Annual
Subscription
in North America
$45

BELARUSIAN REVIEW

Quarterly Information Bulletin (ISSN 1064-7716)
Published by Belarusan-American Association, Inc.
a fraternal nonprofit association
Managing Editor: P.O. Box 10353, Torrance, CA 90505 USA
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http://members.aol.com/belreview/index.html

Vol. 12, No. 4 Winter 2000-2001



Boundaries shown on this map are those of the Republic of Belarus, and do not include the entire Belarusian ethnic territory parts of which extend into neighboring states.

EDITOR'S DESK

Next Year's Presidential Election in Belarus

The word is out that the presidential elections in Belarus will take place in 2001 — likely in September. After an abortive presidential election staged by the opposition in May 1999 — which the government blocked — and the government-rigged parliamentary election in October 2000 — which the opposition boycotted — attention has shifted to the presidential election in 2001. Between now and then, Belarus faces four cardinal questions. First, can the opposition unite behind a credible challenger — perhaps a previously unknown figure like Serbia's Kostunica? Second, how would Łukašenka react to it? Third, what will Russia do? And fourth, what will the West do?

THE OPPOSITION. Belarus' democratic opposition, which enjoys Western support, has yet to name a single candidate for president. Moves in that direction are under way. In December, the Coordinating Council of the Belarusian Democratic Forces held a meeting in Miensk at which representatives of the largest opposition parties and movements nominated Michail Čyhir (Chigir), former prime minister; Uladzimir Hančaryk (Goncharik), chair of the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions; and Siamion Domaš, deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet and chair of the Coordinating Council of Belarusian Regions, as potential democratic opposition presidential candidates. The Council believes that through negotiations with other opposition groups it would be possible to nominate a single presidential candidate.

Some of the regime's opponents talk about a Yugoslav end to Łukašenka. But some foreign news media, *The Economist* (October 21, 2000) for example, think conditions in Miensk look very different from those in Belgrade. The newspaper notes that people in Belarus are more apathetic; the sense of nationhood, and therefore of patriotism, is far weaker; and the opposition is notably feebler. "Growing poverty makes people surly, but as long as Russia supplies cheap energy, the economy will not collapse."

Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič, Belarus' former head of state, and now one of the active opposition leaders, says that next year holds the promise of political change for Belarus "if the opposition plays its cards right." He shrugs off the possibility of a Yugoslav-style popular revolt, pointing out that after centuries of suppressed national consciousness and 80 years in which personal initiative of any kind was stifled, Belarusians are not ready to take to the streets *en masse*.

Some opponents fear that when things get tough Łukašenka might proclaim a state of emergency and preempt a presidential election altogether, with Russia deploying its security and military forces to occupy Belarus outright.

According to a recent survey of the Belarusian public opinion, 36 percent of Belarusians intend to vote for Łukašenka in 2001, while 42 percent say they will not.

THE GOVERNMENT. To fortify his hold on power, Łukašenka, in late November and early December, removed or demoted native Belarusians and moved more Russians into security-sensitive positions. For example, he replaced the heads of the KGB and National Security Council, both native Belarusians, with natives of Russia with backgrounds in the Soviet Union's and the Russian Federation's intelligence agencies.

Now, for the first time since the 1950s, native Russians control top Belarusian posts. This group also includes Prime Minister Vladimir Yermoshin, Defense Minister Colonel General Aleksandr Chumakov and the speaker of the new Chamber of Representatives. This Russian hold on power in Belarus guarantees Łukašenka's loyalty to Moscow and prevents the formation of a high-level native bureaucracy that could defend independent Belarusian statehood against absorption by Russia.

Exiled Supreme Soviet Chairman Siamion Šarecki recently noted that "Belarus is witnessing the completion of a 'cleansing' of the regime from Belarusians." In its ethnic composition, he said, "our country's dictatorial regime is almost completely Russian and, in relation to Belarus, of an occupational nature," Some local observers believe that the recent shake-up was prompted by the Kremlin, which plans to support Łukašenka again in the next presidential election. Russia does not want another Kostunica.

Unleashing propaganda war. During a meeting with the KGB leadership in November, Łukašenka accused the West of funding his political opponents and contemplating plans to overthrow his government, using ideology, money and other tricks, even including the use of military means. He called on the KGB to be vigilant, ordered surveillance of foreign diplomats, and demanded that he be warned of any foreign plans and intentions.

In December, Łukašenka directed the Belarusian State Television and Radio to take "extreme measures" to blunt Western influence in Belarus and to make sure that the population is provided with "objective information." Soon enough, the Belarusian state TV program *"Resonance"* aired a news feature which accused the democratic opposition of smuggling large amounts of weapons and explosives into the country to stage a bloody *coup d'etat.*

One of Łukašenka's targets has been the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Miensk. He said he would like to see it go. Addressing the upper house of his rubber-stamp parliament, Łukašenka said he would not tolerate any foreign interference in the country's internal affairs, especially any cash injection in the opposition's presidential election campaign. He said he was keeping an eye on Western bodies, including the Minsk mission of the OSCE, which, he said, "is preparing bands of collaborators." "If we make embarrassing facts public," he said "they would have to leave our country." Following the president's cue, Belarusian TV called the mission "an instrument of subversive anti-constitutional activity against the Belarusian state." And a day later, it broadcast a "documentary" in which OSCE Miensk mission head Hans-Georg Wieck was called a "German spy."

It has been reported that Łukašenka is about to sign a decree on restructuring the state administration of ideology. The decree would require all state institutions and organizations, and larger state-owned enterprises, to set up ideology departments. To ensure that Soviet-era ideology prevails, a Council for Ideological Policy, reporting directly to the president, will be established.

RUSSIA. With Łukašenka in power for the last six years, Russia has gained most of what it wanted in Belarus: a deniable proxy in the international arms trade, a forward base for radar and eavesdropping, an agreement for placing extra troops or missiles, free transit of troops and fright, and economic leverage through the control of energy supply. "Russia is practically doing for us what the IMF is doing for Russia," Łukašenka admitted. Some observers maintain that Moscow decides everything what happens in Belarus, including the fate of Łukašenka. And so long as Russia sees an advantage in keeping Łukašenka in power, it will do so.

Geographically, Miensk is much closer to Moscow than Belgrade, which makes it much easier for Russia to manipulate the events in Belarus. And, more to the point, more and more Russians appear to want to restore something like the borders of what was the Soviet Union. According to a recent poll, some 55 percent of Russians believe that it is Russia's "historical mission" to pull together the peoples and lands that formed the pre-1917 Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič noted in an interview that, with the willing help of Łukašenka to bring Miensk back into Russia's fold, Russia has skillfully manipulated events to make it look like Russia is keeping Belarus afloat and that, by itself, Belarus cannot exist as a sovereign state.

THE WEST. According to *The Economist* (October 21, 2000), there are clear differences between America and Germany over how to treat Belarus. The newspaper noted that "the OSCE office in Miensk, headed by a German diplomat, Hans-Georg Wieck, preaches patience and engagement."

While some members of the opposition find fault with the German attitude toward Belarus, especially that of Ambassador Wieck, the United States seems to support the OSCE AMG activities in Belarus. Ambassador David T. Johnson, U.S. Representative to the OSCE, told the Permanent Council on December 14 in Vienna that the United States considers the activities of the OSCE AMG in Belarus not only consistent with its mandate, but also vital to ensuring that the forthcoming presidential elections in Belarus will meet international standards. The efforts of Ambassador Wieck and his colleagues are needed now more than ever to help Belarus meet its human rights commitments, Johnson said.

Currently, Wieck's organization in Miensk is engaged in training local monitors to be deployed during the forthcoming presidential election.

Michael G. Kozak, the new U.S. Ambassador to Belarus, said in an interview that Belarus has a parliament, which the U.S. cannot recognize as a legitimate legislative body and a president whose mandate has expired. Regarding the next year's presidential election, he said that if the presidential elections do not differ from the recently held parliamentary elections, Belarus will have both a president and a legislature which lack authority to act on behalf of the nation.

Thank God, Milosevic is gone. Łukašenka is the last tyrant left in Europe. In our view, the West should now turn its attention to help Belarus get rid of that tyrant. The upcoming presidential election offers perhaps the last opportunity to restore democracy in Belarus and preserve its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. If this opportunity is missed, Belarus will become one of Russia's provinces and Russia will again pose threat to Western Europe.

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Acknowledgments

At this time of year, we would like once again to thank our readers for their interest in our publication and their loyal support expressed in a variety of ways: verbal encouragement, subscriptions, gift subscriptions, and individual donations. Special thanks go to all of those who gave their time generously to write articles for BR, gave permission to reprint their articles free of charge, help with edit/proofreading, and send materials of interest to BR.

Financial Support. We thank LukJan Metal Products, Inc., for making a financial contribution of $455 to BR in 2000.
Support in Creating BR. We wish to express our thanks to our friends who helped prepare this issue: Paul Goble and David Marples for contributing articles; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty for permission to reprint copyrighted material; Charter '97 and International League for Human Rights for using their material; Orest Deychakiwsky and Alex Silwanowicz for helping with source material; Olga Wilson for newspaper clippings; Bahdan Andrusyshyn for editing; George Stankevich for translating, typesetting and distribution; and Vaclaŭ Bahdanovič for reproducing the issue in Belarus.

We wish you a happy and prosperous New Year!

Joe Price
Editor

FEATURES

Leadership of U.S. Helsinki Commission Voice Their Views on Belarus Elections

Following are Congressional Record statements by Helsinki Commission co-chairman, Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, and Helsinki Commission chairman, Rep. Christopher H. Smith, in connection with the House Congressional Resolution 443 on the Belarus elections.

DEMOCRACY DENIED IN BELARUS (Senate - October 19, 2000)

Mr. **CAMPBELL.** Mr. President, I am pleased to join as an original cosponsor of this resolution introduced by my colleague from Illinois, Senator Durbin, to address the continuing constitutional crisis in Belarus.

As Co-Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, during the 106th Congress I have worked on a bipartisan basis to promote the core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Belarus in keeping with that country's commitments as a participating State in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Back in April the OSCE set four criteria for international observation of parliamentary elections held this past weekend: respect for human rights and an end to the climate of fear; opposition access to the state media; a democratic electoral code; and the granting of real power to the new parliament.

Regrettably, the Lukashenka regime responded with at best halfhearted measures aimed at giving the appearance of progress while keeping democracy in check. Instead of using the elections process to return Belarus to the path of democracy and end that country's self-isolation, Mr. Lukashenka tightened his grip on power launching an intensified campaign of harassment against the democratic opposition and fledgling independent media. Accordingly, a technical assessment team dispatched by the OSCE concluded that the elections fell short of meeting minimum commitments for free, fair, equal accountable, and transparent elections . The President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE confirmed the flawed nature of the campaign period.

We recently saw how Slobodan Milosevic was swept from power by a wave of popular discontent following years of repression. After his ouster, Belarus now has the dubious distinction of being the sole remaining dictatorship in Europe. Misguided steps toward recognition of the results of Belarus' flawed parliamentary elections would only serve to bolster Mr. Lukashenka in the lead up to presidential elections slated for next year.

This situation was addressed today in an editorial in the Washington Times. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a copy of this editorial be printed in the Record following my remarks.

I commend Senator Durbin for his leadership on this issue and will continue to work with my colleagues to support the people of Belarus in their quest to move beyond dictatorship to genuine democracy

INTRODUCTION OF HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION REGARDING BELARUS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH (Extension of Remarks - October 28, 2000)

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH In the House of Representatives THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2000

Mr. **SMITH** of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to cosponsor House Concurrent Resolution 433, a resolution introduced on Monday by my colleague on the International Relations Committee, Mr. Gejdensen, concerning the recent parliamentary elections in Belarus.

The Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other European institutions, as well as the State Department, all concluded that these elections were not free, fair and transparent and that they failed to meet the international norms for democratic elections. Unfortunately, the Lukashenka regime did not meet the four conditions that the OSCE set back last spring — namely, a democratic election law, an end to human rights abuses, access by the opposition to the state media, and genuine powers be granted to the parliament. Instead, in the run-up to the elections, we witnessed the denial of registration to many opposition candidates; detentions and fines of individuals advocating a boycott of the elections; confiscation of 100,000 copies of an independent newspaper among other examples of harassment of the opposition; rampant governmental interference in the election process and extensive irregularities on election day itself. These elections represent a continuing pattern of violations of human rights and the erosion of democracy which has haunted Belarus throughout the last six years of Alexander Lukashenka's rule.

The Helsinki Commission, which I chair, has monitored and chronicles developments in Belarus, holding hearings which have included Belarusian democratic opposition leaders and leaders of the 13th Supreme Soviet, the legitimate parliament which Lukashenka disbanded in 1996. In July, I led the US delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Bucharest where the deteriorating situation in Belarus was high on our agenda. Importantly, this resolution includes language reaffirming Congress' recognition of the 13th Supreme Soviet as the sole democratically elected and constitutionally legitimate legislative body in Belarus, which is also important, especially as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly continues to recognize that to seat the 13th Supreme Soviet as well. In the last few years, I have made numerous direct and indirect intercessions, including through various OSCE institutions, to draw attention to the deplorable situation in Belarus and to encourage the establishment of democracy in Belarus and I assure you that the Helsinki Commission will continue its efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be an original cosponsor of this resolution, and am eager for the House to go on record in support of the restoration of democracy in Belarus. I am especially pleased that the resolution urges the Lukashenka regime to provide a full accounting of the disappearances of several prominent opposition members and urges the release of those imprisoned in Belarus for their political views. I look forward to working with my colleagues to keep the spotlight on Belarus and to encourage the Belarusian government to comply with its freely undertaken OSCE and other international commitments.

U.S. Senate Concurrent Resolution 153 On Belarus Elections

The following resolution, which was introduced in both the House and Senate on October 19, passed the Senate on October 25, 2000.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Whereas on October 15, 2000, Aleksandr Lukashenko and his authoritarian regime conducted an illegitimate and undemocratic parliamentary election in an effort to further strengthen the power and control his authoritarian regime exercises over the people of the Republic of Belarus;

Whereas during the time preceding this election the regime of Aleksandr Lukashenko attempted to intimidate the democratic opposition by beating, harassing, arresting, and sentencing its members for supporting a boycott of the October 15 election even though Belarus does not contain a legal ban on efforts to boycott elections;

Whereas the democratic opposition in Belarus was denied fair and equal access to state-controlled television and radio and was instead slandered by the state-controlled media;
Whereas on September 13, 2000, Belarusian police seized 100,000 copies of a special edition of the Belarusian Free Trade Union newspaper, Rabochy, dedicated to the democratic opposition's efforts to promote a boycott of the October 15 election;
Whereas Aleksandr Lukashenko and his regime denied the democratic opposition in Belarus seats on the Central Election Commission, thereby violating his own pledge to provide the democratic opposition a role in this Commission;
Whereas Aleksandr Lukashenko and his regime denied the vast majority of independent candidates opposed to his regime the right to register as candidates in this election;
Whereas Aleksandr Lukashenko and his regime dismissed recommendations presented by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for making the election law in Belarus consistent with OSCE standards;
Whereas in Grodno, police loyal to Aleksandr Lukashenko summoned voters to participate in this illegitimate election for parliament;
Whereas the last genuinely free and fair parliamentary election in Belarus took place in 1995 and from it emerged the 13th Supreme Soviet whose democratically and constitutionally derived authorities and powers have been undercut by the authoritarian regime of Aleksandr Lukashenko; and
Whereas on October 11, the Lukashenko regime froze the bank accounts and seized the equipment of the independent publishing company, Magic, where most of the independent newspapers in Minsk are published: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring),

SECTION 1. SENSE OF CONGRESS ON BELARUS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS.

Congress hereby--

(1) declares that--

(A) the period preceding the elections held in Belarus held on October 15, 2000, was plagued by continued human rights abuses and a climate of fear for which the regime of Aleksandr Lukashenko is responsible;

(B) these elections were conducted in the absence of a democratic electoral law;

(C) the Lukashenko regime purposely denied the democratic opposition access to state-controlled media; and

(D) these elections were for seats in a parliament that lacks real constitutional power and democratic legitimacy;

(2) declares its support for the Belarus' democratic opposition, commends the efforts of the opposition to boycott these illegitimate parliamentary elections, and expresses the hopes of Congress that the citizens of Belarus will soon benefit from true freedom and democracy;

(3) reaffirms its recognition of the 13th Supreme Soviet as the sole and democratically and constitutionally legitimate legislative body of Belarus; and

(4) notes that, as the legitimate parliament of Belarus, the 13th Supreme Soviet should continue to represent Belarus in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS ON DISAPPEARANCES OF INDIVIDUALS AND POLITICAL DETENTIONS IN BELARUS.

It is the sense of Congress that the President should call upon Aleksandr Lukashenko and his regime to--

(1) provide a full accounting of the disappearances of individuals in that country, including the disappearance of Viktor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky, Yuri Zakharenka, and Dmitry Zavadsky; and

(2) release Vladimir Kudinov, Andrei Klimov, and all others imprisoned in Belarus for their political views.

SEC. 3. TRANSMITTAL OF RESOLUTION.

The Secretary of the Senate shall transmit a copy of this resolution to the President.

Passed the Senate October 25 (legislative day, September 22), 2000.

OSCE Troika Finds Belarus Elections Flawed

Press Release, 27 October 2000

Troika Ministers address pressing OSCE issues at Vienna meeting

VIENNA, 27 October 2000 — The Foreign Ministers of the OSCE Troika —Benita Ferrero-Waldner of Austria, Petre Roman of Romania, and Espen Barth Eide (State Secretary) of Norway met today in Vienna to review issues of concern to the OSCE. Following is an excerpt addressing the question of the October 15 elections in Belarus:

The Ministers were discouraged by the conduct of the 15 October parliamentary elections in Belarus. They noted that both the parliamentary Troika and the OSCE/ODIHR Technical Assessment Mission concluded that insufficient process had been made to meet international standards for democratic elections and that the process remained flawed.

They expressed the hope that in the lead up to next years presidential elections progress would be made in the four areas of reform identified by the international community, which entail: greater transparency of the election process, establishment of a climate of confidence and trust, regular access to state-controlled electronic mass media for opposition parties and strengthening of the functions of parliament.

The Ministers denounced the accusations by the Belarus Government regarding the objectivity of the OSCE's assessments and that the OSCE Assistance and Monitoring Group to Belarus was channelling funds to the opposition. They also condemned the jailing of Mrs. Julia Chigir, the wife of the former Belarus Prime Minister, a move which the AMG said appears to be "politically motivated and represents another attempt to silence the opposition in Belarus." They reiterated their strong support for the work of the AMG.

[*Source*: OSCE Website, http://www.osce.org]

U.S. on Belarus Elections and OSCE AMG Role in Belarus

Ambassador David Johnson, U.S. permanent representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), issued the following two statements on Belarus to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna. In his November 2 statement, he said that the October 15 elections in Belarus "were neither free, fair, nor democratic" and that "the 13th Supreme Soviet, led by Chairman Semyon Sharetsky, should continue to be accepted by the international community as the legitimate parliament of Belarus." In his December 7 statement, he urged Belarus to cooperate with the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Minsk. He said, the United States believes the AMG "continues to play a valuable role in assisting Belarus to meet its OSCE commitments, particularly during the run-up to Presidential elections next year."

Following is the text of Ambassador Johnson's statements:

Belarus Elections neither Free, Fair, nor Democratic

Vienna, November 2, 2000

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We very much appreciate the detailed report that Ambassador Wieck [Ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck, head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus] has provided us this morning. We would like to reaffirm our support for him and his staff in their tireless efforts to promote a return to democracy in Belarus.

We regret that despite the best efforts of him, his colleagues at the Advisory and Monitoring Group, the Parliamentary Assembly Troika, ODIHR [OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights], and many others in the international community, the recent elections in Belarus were indeed a setback for democracy.

We are, nonetheless, convinced that the AMG has made a positive contribution, particularly with regard to its dialogue with the government, the opposition, and the NGO community.

Indeed, its groundbreaking work with NGOs in establishing a network of over 5,500 domestic election observers working at 3,500 polling stations deserves special mention and praise.

As Ambassador Wieck mentioned, those observers substantiated that the required 50 percent threshold was not met in more than a third of the constituencies. They also established strong evidence that the nationwide turnout was about 40 percent, rather than the 60 percent claimed. And they documented 80 different methods employed to manipulate the vote count.

Mr. Chairman, the recent elections regrettably did not meet Belarus's OSCE commitments and were neither free, fair, nor democratic. In this light, we believe the 13th Supreme Soviet, led by Chairman Semyon Sharetsky, should continue to be accepted by the international community as the legitimate parliament of Belarus.

But, Mr. Chairman, while one should not forget the past, it is even more important to look to the future and next year's presidential elections.

Belarusian authorities assert that President Lukashenko enjoys the overwhelming popular support of Belarus' citizens. We are willing to put that proposition to the test. If he holds free, fair and transparent elections that allow for a real contest with the opposition, we will be the first to accept their outcome.

But for this to take place, the government needs to take concrete, significant and irreversible steps now to meet the four criteria established by the Troika. It needs to allow the democratic opposition access to the state-controlled media; to comply with human rights standards, including the release of political prisoners and an end to show trials; to reform the electoral code in keeping with ODIHR's recommendations; and to work with the AMG, ODIHR and the Parliamentary Troika and allow them further to develop a dialogue with the opposition and the NGO community.

We are convinced that the AMG through its outreach, as well as its programs with the Belarusian authorities, the opposition and civil society and its continued monitoring and reporting can continue to play a significant role. We take note of AMG priorities and add that a robust and proactive presence on its part is needed now more than ever. The Belarusian people deserve a free and fair election.

The Belarusian authorities need to take the necessary steps now to carry out free and fair elections next year. Only then will those elections win the respect of the international community.

Thank you.

U.S. Urging Belarus to Cooperate with OSCE Advisory Group
Vienna, December 7, 2000

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.

We share your strong support for the important work of the Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk. We too believe that it continues to play a valuable role in assisting Belarus to meet its OSCE commitments, particularly during the run-up to Presidential elections next year. An active Assistance and Monitoring Group can provide invaluable assistance to the Belarusian authorities in helping those authorities implement the requirements of the criteria established by the OSCE Troika with respect to the Presidential elections.

The AMG has already laid a key cornerstone for democratic Presidential elections by training a team of domestic observers. These experienced observers rendered democracy in Belarus a vital service in the last elections. The AMG's continued support of a domestic observation effort will help the Belarusian authorities ensure that the Presidential elections are indeed democratic.

Madame Chairperson, when the Permanent Council adopted a clear mandate for the AMG it set it for two tasks -- to assist the Belarusian authorities in promoting democratic institutions and in complying with other OSCE commitments and to monitor and report on this process.

Ambassador Wieck and his colleagues have demonstrated a high degree of integrity and commitment in faithfully carrying out this mandate. AMG activities in support of civil society, development of the media, and monitoring of commitments are not only consistent with that mandate, but central to its fulfillment.

We urge the Government of Belarus to extend to the AMG its full cooperation and support as a way to signal its determination to meet its OSCE commitments and to carry out truly democratic presidential elections. Thank you.

[Distributed by the Office of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://usinfo.state.gov]

THOUGHTS and OBSERVATIONS

The Elections in Belarus and the Opposition Dilemmas

By David Marples

Belarus, arguably the most repressive country in Europe, has recently completed a parliamentary election campaign. On October 15, the electorate went to the polls to elect delegates to a parliament that has had no authority since November 1996 and is currently a ritualistic phenomenon. Neither the EU nor the Americans sent monitors to these elections, which were boycotted by a section of the opposition, including the Belarusian Popular Front and Christian Conservative Party, and in which candidates who were willing to take part were deprived of a mandate to do so. Are the elections then a non-event? There are many in Belarus who disagree and who saw the elections as a potential turning point in the long quest to end the dictatorship of President Alyaksandar Lukashenka.

In Miensk, in August, I discussed these issues with Hienadz Hrushavy, chairman of the NGO, the Belarusian Charitable Fund "For the Children of Chernobyl" and one of the parliamentary deputies who were deprived of their positions when Lukashenka peremptorily reduced the size of the parliament from 260 to 120 deputies late in 1996. Hrushavy's view is that if change is to come in Belarus, then the opposition in the form of reputable non-party deputies, well known to the general public, must undermine the regime from within, using the official structures.

According to Hrushavy, some 20-30 deputies working within the parliament could have created a significant opposition to the regime. Street demonstrations (of which there have been several major ones already this year) have been of limited significance and serve only to alienate the rural population. In his view, Belarus will also change through the intervention of Russia, with which it has actively sought integration over the past four years. How does one explain such an irony?

As long as Boris Yeltsin was president, Hrushavy claims, Lukashenka had a free hand to conduct his idiosyncratic and vindictive politics. These included seeking closer ties with "Mother" Russia, while arresting and beating oppositionists, several of whom have "disappeared" over the past year, while others -- such as former prime minister Mikhail Chyhir -- have been imprisoned and subjected to heavy fines. Putin, on the other hand, is not willing to see Lukashenka act independently. He does not wish to be perceived as harboring and abetting a dictator in the center of Europe.

So what does Putin want? According to this scenario, he prefers a weaker Lukashenka who would be less confrontational toward the United States and Europe. Ideally, the Belarusian president must return to democratic principles. In turn, Lukashenka will be obliged to relinquish some of his powers to parliament and the cabinet of ministers, which will grow in significance over time.

Hrushavy is not alone in his beliefs. Ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck, who leads the OSCE's Advisory and Monitoring Group in Miensk, has offered similar views (see his letter to the *Belarusian Review* in the fall issue). For four years, Ambassador Wieck has sought to create a dialogue in Miensk between the

government and the opposition. He has succeeded in creating a more united opposition, and in bringing together disparate groups that formerly could not tolerate each other. Yet, there is no dialogue. Wieck would nonetheless have liked to have seen the opposition to participate in the elections in order to create a mass movement of protest. Both Hrushavy and Wieck repeatedly have maintained that if the opposition would miss the chance to take part in the parliamentary elections in October 2000, it would be obliterated in the presidential elections of 2001, which Lukashenka would then win easily and guarantee himself a further five years in office.

The head of the Popular Front, Vintsuk Viachorka, an enterprising politician of 40, sees things differently. In his view, the elections were a farce and had to be boycotted. The government had failed to fulfill any of its promises to the OSCE of equal access to the media and to the official press. To take part in the elections, therefore, would have been to appease a dictator. Hrushavy, on the other hand, argues that though these comments might be accurate, over 60% of the electorate was expected to participate on October 15 and "they will vote for somebody!" To stand aside from this charade was, therefore, to neglect the voters and to abandon the political struggle. This argument convinced several opposition candidates to stand for election independently of their party affiliation.

Since the interview held with Hrushavy, the Electoral Commission has maintained that his registration, along with the majority submitted by oppositionists, was invalid, allegedly because of discrepancies among the signatures collected or lack of clarity about the financial position of the candidate. Lukashenka thus further restricted the outcome of the elections so as to deprive the anti-government candidates the opportunity of running. Though a few individual oppositionists were permitted to run (such as Statkevich), the majority was banned from taking part in the controversial elections.

Perhaps, from the opposition's perspective, the "ban" was fortuitous. In the past, Lukashenka has blamed the CIA, the Popular Front, even the Russian mafia for the economic dilemmas in Belarus: an average wage of US $45 a month, a pension of US $23, rampant inflation, and rapidly declining living standards. If the opposition effectively would join the "official structure," as Dr. Hrushavy and Ambassador Wieck have advocated, then he could prolong the virtual civil war atmosphere in Miensk. The enemy would no longer be "on the street" but in the parliament. In this respect, Lukashenka's decision to restrict the election to a few chosen opposition candidates may be regarded as a political error.

The opposition has remained isolated and aloof from much of the general public outside the highly politicized capital city of Miensk. The moderate forces in society continue to feel that undermining the administration through government structures is the best way to bring about change in Belarus. One implicit assumption behind this argument is that the Lukashenka regime is not water tight, that it contains personalities who do not necessarily concur with the views and position of the president on various issues. This may be true. But the president has taken one further step to erode the democratic process by denying registration in the election to moderate candidates, many of whom are well known to the public.

It is worth noting the analogy of Yugoslavia. President Slobodan Milosevic was indubitably defeated in a democratic election, but was not willing to concede defeat until forced to do so by public demonstrations. Neither parliamentary processes nor NATO bombs affected his position until the public chose to remove him. A decade ago, rigid pro-communist regimes in Eastern Europe also collapsed as a direct consequence of mass street demonstrations in cities such as Prague and Leipzig. In short, there is little historical evidence to support a theory that democratic change can be attained in Belarus through change within official structures alone. Moreover, seeking such change is tantamount to acknowledging the legitimacy of structures that were developed through highly dubious processes in November 1996, and through a referendum that was clearly doctored by the government.

In addition, there is no certainty that change through public protests is a violent route. In the examples cited elsewhere in Eastern Europe, none were violent. In Belgrade, they were accompanied by the neutrality or overt sympathy of the army and police. However, in Belarus, like Yugoslavia, the attitude of Russia will be critical. Strategically and militarily, the republic is of critical importance to Russia, as Hrushavy has recognized. It is a highly positive sign that Putin appeared to accept and even support the removal of Milosevic.

The key difficulty in Belarus — as indeed elsewhere in countries of the former Soviet Union — the plethora of political parties and diversity of views among the potential political leaders. One looks in vain for a Havel or Walesa, and the painful state of national consciousness in Belarus has created a dichotomy between an exclusively Belarusian solution to this problem and an ostensibly more moderate solution that takes into account the fact that many residents of the republic have a weak command of the language and not much acquaintance with its culture or past. If a challenge is to be made to Lukashenka, however, the opposition forces must focus on one politician rather than several.

The electorate may be politically unsophisticated but it is not without morals, without knowledge. Even through the official media it is possible to sense the frustration the present government feels at the lack of Russian response to the president's overtures. The various problems that have pervaded Belarus in the post-1991 period — a failing economy, declining health standards, low or unpaid wages, crippling inflation, and the continuing ramifications of Chernobyl — have not eased.

The crucial issue now is the presidential election of November 2001. Whatever the merits of the arguments raised here and elsewhere, the elections of October 2000 have proven to be a non-event. The electorate is not unaware, however, that candidates for whom it was willing to provide signatures have not been allowed to take part in a democratic process. Hrushavy, for example, had thousands of signatures in a western suburb of Minsk and his removal from the register cannot but cause resentment among those who support him.

The regime has not changed over the past four years. In fact it is increasingly repressive and arbitrary in its actions -- detentions of protesters, physical attacks on the opposition, harassment of the independent press, and cavalier attitude to the opinions of the outside world. Those oppositionists who have "disappeared" from the political scene (such as Hanchar) have not been found. Yet in Belarus, as elsewhere in eastern Europe, dictatorships might not last long.

David Marples, a professor of history at the University of Alberta, is the author of Belarus: A Denationalized Nation (1999).

Another Attack on the OSCE

By Paul Goble

WASHINGTON, November 30, 2000 — Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka has lashed out at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, rejecting its call for greater democracy in his country and implying that he may soon close the organization's office in Minsk. Speaking to Belarusian security officials on Tuesday [November 28], Lukashenka dismissed OSCE findings that recent parliamentary elections in Belarus did not meet international

standards. And in a remark cited both by Belarusian state television and Russian news services, Lukashenka said that "the time has come to think about the role and place of the OSCE advisory group in Belarus"— a comment which appears to threaten to its continued operation there.

Lukashenka's comments about the OSCE came during a speech which contained harsh words about the West in general and the Belarusian opposition in particular. He claimed the West was supporting his opponents and promised that his regime will expand its "counterintelligence watch over foreign diplomats" to ensure that "they observe Belarusian law." Lukashenka suggested that NATO was planning a military move against Belarus much as it had done against Yugoslavia. He said that Western leaders are "waving a finger and putting a fist to the face of the president and the people of Belarus" and saying "'Be obedient or it will be as it was in Yugoslavia.'" As a result, Lukashenka said, Belarus has been forced to allocate "huge funds to strengthen the air force and air defense troops" in order to get ready to forestall or even repel a possible attack.

Lukashenka's domestic opponents reacted quickly. Vyacheslav Sivchik, a leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, said that Lukashenka's remarks represented his latest "attempt to scare the opposition and foreign diplomats in Belarus" and showed that he believes he can completely eliminate the democratic opposition if international observers like the OSCE are removed from the scene. Sivchik's views were echoed by the Unified Civil Party's Anatoly Lebedko, who said that Lukashenka had made these remarks now because he wants to ensure that there will not be any free media in Belarus to cover what he does or any opposition political parties before Belarus conducts presidential elections sometime in 2001.

But there are at least three reasons to think that more may be involved in these remarks of the authoritarian Belarusian leader. First, Lukashenka's remarks may be part of his ongoing effort to demonstrate his loyalty to Moscow's positions. Many in the Russian capital are certainly likely to view them that way especially since Lukashenka spoke on the very day that Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov was refusing to join an OSCE consensus on a resolution containing language critical of Russian behavior in Chechnya, Georgia, and Moldova. Perhaps even more important, Lukashenka's denunciation of the OSCE comes just before Russian-Belarusian meetings this week designed to move the two countries further along the road toward a new union.

Second, Lukashenka's remarks may be intended as another test of the West, an effort on his part or on the part of others who support him, to see just what the West will tolerate from him and how it will react to the kind of challenge that threatening to close an OSCE mission office represents. Known for his flamboyant language, Lukashenka often has threatened to do things and then acted or not depending on whether and how others react. Such a reading is suggested by the fact that the head of the OSCE observer group in Belarus currently is out of the country and that any response from the OSCE will have to be from more senior and authoritative officials, something that he may assume will be less likely. Lukashenka may be gambling that an OSCE chastened by Russian objections will not be willing to go after him and that he will thus be able to escape criticism from it for what he has threatened and then be in a position actually to implement it. But on Wednesday, the U.S. State Department did react, with its spokesman suggesting that "the OSCE needs to be there, that people in this region, and particularly in Belarus, need to work with the OSCE and follow their guidelines."

And third, Lukashenka's attack and Moscow's refusal to give consensus to an OSCE document may signal a common and much broader decision by Moscow and Minsk to turn away from cooperation with the OSCE and with those Western countries which have pushed hardest to use that organization to promote democracy in Belarus and elsewhere. Because Lukashenka has been so extreme in his remarks so often, many in the West may be tempted to write off his remarks. But to the extent that they do so, the Belarusian leader's past performance suggests that his extreme words this time may soon be followed by equally extreme actions.

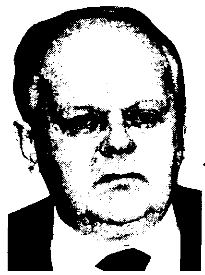
Paul Goble is director, RFE/RL Communications and Technology, and publisher of RFE/RL Newsline. Reprinted by permission of Paul Goble.

Former Belarusian Leader Aims at Change Through the Ballot Box

By Jeremy Bransten

Since his ouster as Belarusian head of state by a Communist-dominated parliament in 1994, Stanislau Shushkevich has been one of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's most ardent critics.

A physicist by training, the 66-year-old Shushkevich became involved in politics in 1986 when he criticized government negligence in reporting on the nuclear accident at Chornobyl in neighboring Ukraine. With the backing of the Belarusian Popular Front, Shushkevich became a member of the Belarusian Supreme Soviet in 1990. The following year, he was named its chairman--the highest post in the country.



Stanislau Shushkevich

Shushkevich was one of the three signatories of the Belovezha accords in December of that year. Those accords created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

He had advocated neutrality in military matters, but in 1993 the Belarusian parliament overrode Shushkevich's objections and voted to join the CIS collective security agreement. Communist legislators forced Shushkevich from his post as head of state soon afterward. He now leads the Social Democratic "Hramada" party.

During a visit to RFE/RL's headquarters in Prague recently, Shushkevich said that Belarus's current leadership has been unable to develop the economy and that for the past several years, Belarus has been subsisting on its aging Communist-era infrastructure. "In Belarus, the relics of gigantic unprofitable communist enterprises are being preserved," he commented. "The relative well-being of society — I stress, relative — and our current survival stems from the fact that we are using up the resources that our fathers and grandfathers amassed."

According to Shushkevich, Belarus's feeble economy means the country is not self-reliant, putting its sovereignty at risk: "In the conditions of such a drop in production and the using up of our basic resources, Belarus cannot pay for its own

upkeep. The labor of its people is not enough to buy it the necessary amount of energy it requires in Russia — gas and coal."

Shushkevich noted that Russia has skillfully manipulated Belarus' predicament — with the willing help of President Lukashenka, to bring Minsk back into its embrace. "As a result, it looks as if Russia is constantly helping this poor Belarus and keeps the poor Belarus afloat, which cannot exist as a sovereign state," he added.

In addition to running the economy into the ground, Shushkevich faults the Belarus leadership for gutting all efforts at nation-building. In 1994, when Lukashenka came to power, textbooks that attempted to portray the region's past objectively were pulled from school shelves, to be replaced by Soviet-era books. The country's post-independence flag was replaced by its Soviet equivalent.

Currently, in the capital Minsk, there is only one secondary school where teaching is conducted in the Belarusian language. As in Soviet times, all students interested in continuing their education must be fluent in Russian. "The possibility of receiving an education in the Belarusian language has been lost," he lamented. "There is not one higher education institution where courses are taught in Belarusian."

The press, too, has been curbed. The few semi-free publications that exist are dwarfed by the output of state-sponsored periodicals. Shushkevich pointed out that "for each edition of the more or less free press — and I say more or less because we have no truly free press — there are 24 government publications of considerably better quality, [that are] cheaper, and so forth."

But Shushkevich says that all these factors, have galvanized the divided opposition. Next year, presidential elections are due, and Shushkevich says the opposition intends to field one candidate against Lukashenka.

Next year holds the promise of political change for Belarus--if the opposition plays its cards right. But Shushkevich says he is determined to effect change through the ballot box. He shrugs off the possibility of a Yugoslav-style popular revolt, pointing out that after centuries of suppressed national consciousness and 80 years in which personal initiative of any kind was stifled, Belarusians are not ready to take to the streets en masse.

"As a physicist, I will tell you: We have different surroundings and different starting conditions." But as a politician, Shushkevich says he intends to be there for his people, whatever happens. (RFE/RL Newsline, December 21, 2000

Jeremy Bransten is an RFE/RL correspondent based in Prague. Copyright (c) 2000 RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Miensk Notebook — December 2000

By David Marples

Following a lecture in Budapest, a hasty visit to Miensk in mid December proved very instructive and enlightening in terms of the political and social situation in the wake of the parliamentary elections.

The Opposition

I had several meetings with Uladzimir Padhol, a perceptive colleague who has made a career as a political analyst and political psychologist. He has elaborated a list of various political forces that are preparing for the presidential elections in September— twelve different groups, though some of which might unite. Recognizing the need for a single candidate, several opposition leaders have already declined to stand, including both Lyabedzka and Vyachorka.

The OSCE View

I had a scheduled meeting with Ambassador Hans Georg Wieck at the headquarters of the OSCE AMG in Miensk, the BBB Hotel building. Yulia Shimko, one of my research assistants in Miensk, accompanied me. In the recent past, I had written an article in the *Belarusian Review*, suggesting that the OSCE might be wiser to pull out of Miensk. Subsequently, the ambassador responded to the Belarusian Review, expressing his strong disagreement with my article. Whether or not the differences between us were really very profound, I am not certain. But, in any event, the situation in Belarus has changed. The government has now turned on the AMG, indicating that it might be asked to leave Miensk. A malicious documentary about Ambassador Wieck aired recently on Belarusian TV's Panarama program that dispensed with any attempts at accuracy or objectivity and maligned the ambassador as a "German spy."

I considered, then as now, that an organization's effectiveness in a highly authoritarian state might be measured by its reception by the government. Clearly, the AMG has begun to have an impact on the political scene in Belarus. The regime remains furious that the parliamentary elections were neither fully monitored nor recognized by the AMG and other European organizations. The AMG, in the government's view, has joined forces with the opposition. However, political parties such as the Christian Conservative Party of the BNF, led by Zianon Pazniak, have also turned on the AMG. The ambassador remarked that the OSCE AMG in Miensk, with a staff of five people, could not be regarded as a political force.

Ambassador Wieck also noted, with regard to the forthcoming presidential election, that the focus should be not on personalities but on social fo rces in the country. Though both the official and unofficial trade unions have been relatively ineffective in harnessing such sectors, the fact remains that the urban workers are potentially the most significant electoral block. The alternative candidate to Lukashenka, therefore, need not necessarily come from the official opposition.

The ambassador's comments were supported by other evidence I found later in Miensk. New sociological surveys conducted by Professor Oleg Manayev and other groups, including the AMG, offer some profound conclusions. Clearly, Lukashenka would win convincingly against any of the logical candidates from the opposition — Domash, Statkevich, Chyhir, etc. This may be because of the political baggage of these politicians, accumulated through past campaigns and attacks through the official media. The government's continuing control over the media , and likely choice of the process, would also likely be significant. However, if the alternative were an independent candidate, the general population, according to the surveys, is split almost evenly between the president and the unknown candidate.

Among the elite — factory managers, white-collar workers, leaders of institutions — Lukashenka's standing is very low and an alternative candidate would be overwhelmingly popular. The general population clearly holds Lukashenka responsible for the economic malaise — this was not always the case in the past. A large majority perceives the economy as the key factor in the election. Hence, as Ambassador Wieck noted, the coming months are likely to be a tempestuous period both for the country and the OSCE group in Miensk.

The Students

I gave two lectures at the European Humanities University to American Studies classes. Thus, these were students who are for the most part westward looking. The first lecture looked at the history of Belarus and current politics; the second at the eastward expansion of the European Union and its likely impact on the country. I decided to be fairly outspoken and to give the sort of lecture that I would deliver in Canada — though

I could be more detailed as these students clearly lived and breathed the political atmosphere of Miensk. In the first lecture, there were no local professors present, but all the same it still took the students a few moments to realize that they were really free to express themselves. But once the process began, they were very critical of the government. In fact, there were no comments in favor of the Lukashenka regime. At one point, I asked how many of the students had considered emigration, and over half the class raised their hands.

The second lecture was a full house, including some university faculty. My talk was introduced by Professor Yuri Stulov, a regular visitor to the United States, and an articulate critic of the government. Another faculty member seemed shocked by my comments. Afterward, she bolted from the room as though it was on fire. I tried to stress that there were alternatives for Belarus. It is not simply Russia versus the West — as implied by the government. There is no problem with pursuing two directions simultaneously. I told the students that Lukashenka's outlook was not so unusual — it is that of a typical former collective farm chairman given a position of national significance. It was always unlikely that the president would have any vision of the future, or that he could offer some conceptions of Belarus in 2005 or 2010.

One student asked poignantly that if Belarus chose a westward direction, and Russia objected, would the West come to Belarus' aid? Others asked about corruption, about the opposition, about the possibility (implying its remoteness) of removing Lukashenka from power, what "the West" thought about the parliamentary elections, why were they not recognized? As always, I was struck by their intelligence and general knowledge. They were shocked that a foreigner should be so interested in their country. Was I of Slavic background, they asked; did I have ancestors from Belarus?

The New US Ambassador

After the second lecture, which took place on December 16, I went directly to the US Embassy for a meeting with Ambassador Michael Kozak, and we had a relaxed and informal discussion. The only other person present was a Marine sergeant at the door. Ambassador Kozak is a career diplomat in his 50s (I assumed — he looked younger, but he has been married for 34 years) who has extensive experience in Central America, particularly in Panama and Nicaragua. As he informed me, he knows a lot about dictators and the impossibility of getting them to change their opinions. He cited the example of Fidel Castro, who, he believes, has not changed either his views or his ruthless methods with the passage of time.

The US ambassador stressed several points during our discussion. First, the role of the US is to promote democracy in Belarus, not to side with the opposition or any individual candidates. Second, any change in the country has to begin with the presidential elections. One cannot seek several goals at once, such as reforming the Constitution (or reverting to the original Constitution), the Parliament, or the Constitutional Court. He also concurs with the views of Ambassador Wieck that the elections offer an opportunity for the broad participation of the population.

Mr. Kozak cited the story of his meeting with some members of the opposition. One leader had declared that the electorate in Belarus was "stupid" and needed to be educated, partly through the media, which was closed off thanks to the failure of the US and other countries to persuade Belarus to adhere to the conditions laid by the OSCE at the Istanbul summit of 1999. The ambassador had retorted that a politician who maintains that the electorate is stupid is a stupid politician. The US does not care whether the president or the opposition candidate wins the election as long as the process is democratic. In short, then, the approach is logical, forthright, and no-nonsense, which seemed to me appropriate when dealing with the government of Belarus.

The US ambassador and his staff are already making headlines in the official media and have been accused of applying "double standards" toward Belarus. The irony of the accusation is precisely that Belarus itself applies double standards to the political and democratic process — on the one hand, it claims to adhere to democratic methods and structures; but, on the other, it eliminates any vestiges of democracy and even voices that express views that differ from the official version. The scurrilous attacks on the current and previous US ambassadors and on Ambassador Wieck personally (with resort to blatant lies in both cases) are a sign of the nervousness of the president at the current juncture.

Public Life

Public life in Miensk is a story of contrasts. Each visit one sees new restaurants and stores opened, while for the majority of the population life appears to get worse by stages, unremittingly and relentlessly. The dollar now exchanges for 1,200 Belarus rubles (formerly, 1.2 million); public transport is horribly overcrowded. Though I had tickets, I never actually paid for a fare on a bus because, generally, I was on the steps at the exit holding on for dear life. Virtually everyone at some point brings up the question of money and the need for it. I spent more money than ever before — prices are high for most goods. The new restaurants include Voyazh, in a plush setting close to the Frunzenskaya metro station. There I heard some wonderful blues music, mercifully after the leather jacketed cell-phone brigade of "new Belarusians" had departed.

Dr. David Marples is a professor of history at the University of Alberta and the author of Belarus: A Denationalized Nation (1999).

BELARUS' FORUM

WE HAD TO BOYCOTT OCTOBER ELECTIONS ...

Excerpts from an article by the Belarus' opposition leader Vincuk Viačorka, written for the Prague newspaper *Lidové Noviny.*

It is highly probable that no one rejoiced more over Milosevic's downfall than we Belarusians. We did so for two reasons. The first of which is that, at the turn of millennium, our people realize European dictatorships are an anachronism. I'll get to the second reason a bit later.

In Belarus, we followed the events in Belgrade with great attentiveness. We were able to compare the achievements of the Serbian opposition with those of our own. We compared Milosevic's actions with those of Łukašenka. And we asked: Might the Belgrade scenario be reenacted in Minsk ? And if not, why not ?

Actually anti-Milosevic Serbs were victorious in the presidential election not once, but twice — the first time, at the ballot box and the second, in the streets.

The Belarus opposition refused to participate in the country's parliamentary elections in October. At first glance, it may seem that we were just avoiding a fight.. Łukašenka's regime, to say nothing of the one in Moscow, actually wanted us to participate. They did everything possible to persuade some democratic politicians to run — as such participation would grant the process a degree of legitimacy.

But, how could we participate in such an election ? Whereas the Serbian contest was one for real presidential power, the election in Belarus was to a pseudo-parliamentary organ whose deputies have no



Vincuk Viačorka

real authority; they make no independent decisions with regard to the functioning of the state. The so-called Assembly of Representatives neither confirms ministers nor approves a budget. Every decision it makes is based on a decree issued by Alaksandr Łukašenka. This rubber stamp parliament stems from the "vertical" system of government created after a state coup in November 1996. (This coup, incidentally, took place just prior to an attempt by the opposition to have Łukašenka impeached. It was only through the unprecedented intervention of Moscow that the dictator managed to remain in power.)

We oppose the union with Russia !

Sociological surveys confirm that 76% of Belarusians agree with us on this point. And although the idea of union may stir the soul of retired Soviet officers and party bosses, it does nothing for the average Belarusian woman who watches daily reports of violence and death in Chechnya on Russian television. . In a so-called Russian-Belarusian state, her sons will once again become cannon fodder for Kremlin adventure-seekers, much as they had in Afghanistan a generation earlier.

Our citizens, however, have no means of expressing their true view on unification with Russia (read: de facto incorporation) as Łukašenka has removed all mechanisms for such expression.

Had we, the advocates of an independent and democratic Belarus, even agreed to participate in the election farce, there was no guarantee we would be afforded access to the resulting parliament. Indeed, several dozen contenders from democratic parties that did participate, soon found themselves disqualified by electoral commissions subordinate to the regime.

Among the initial tasks assigned to the new pseudo-parliament elected last Sunday is the ratification of union agreements with Russia. This is because current agreements have no international validity: they were ratified by an illegitimate parliament and signed by a president whose legal term in office expired on 21 July 1999.

Presidential elections.

What then is there left for us to do ?

Precisely all the things we have done thus far and are continuing to do — i.e. boycotting the pseudo-elections, collecting signatures in support of the four conditions which must be met in order to conduct democratic elections, staging demonstrations and freedom marches all over the country. We are doing all the same things the Serbs did for the last two years — and we being arrested, sued and intimidated as a result. This proves our assertion that the results of the October 15 election cannot be recognized.

Everything that has happened thus far prepares us for the presidential election next year. We are fighting to secure conditions to hold such an election and are drawing up plans for the nomination of a single democratic candidate. By staging street protests, we are training our cadres for future victory. This year, Łukašenka's approval rating fell below 25%; he will have no chance of prevailing in an honest and democratic contest.

We know that the Czech people can empathize with us. They themselves battled against a Communist dictatorship to gain real independence. Václav Havel's message to the All-Belarusian Congress for Independence on 29 July of this year was a missive of great significance to us, Czech politicians who visited our country — Jan Ruml and Michael Žantovský — defend the democratic viewpoint and oppose the Łukašenka's dictatorship in the international arena.

We appreciate the efforts of Czech society in helping us become full-fledged members of the European family of nations. Czechs today continue the tradition set by president Masaryk in the 1920s by giving Belarusian students persecuted in their own country an opportunity to study at Czech universities, The Czech "People in Need" foundation has recently opened an office in Minsk. We very much count on continued Czech support on the European stage.

Finally — the second reason for our joyful toasting of Milosevic's fall from power: His departure made it considerably easier for us to persuade European structures to abstain from recognizing a de facto dictator. For although dictators are not eternal , one should refrain from artificially prolonging their hold on power.

Vincuk Viačorka
Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front
Chairman of the Coordinating Council
of Democratic Forces of Belarus

ŠUŠKIEVIČ: CZECH SUPPORT OF ŁUKAŠENKA WAS SHAMEFUL ...

Interview with former Belarus leader Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič (Shushkevich) for Prague's Lidové Noviny, Nov. 15, 2000

Radicals considered him too moderate and communists an outsider — yet in the turbulent days of the 1991 Moscow coup, Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič became Belarus' head of state. And it was Šuškievič who convened the meeting that declared the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Until 1994, he resisted attempts to reverse Belarus to its Soviet past. Western journalists attributed his success in this endeavor to personal charm. Yet charm proved to be insufficient — and in 1994, Alaksandr Łukašenka, a man intent on reviving the Soviet era, deposed Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič. He succeeded in spades: poverty and international isolation have become the hallmarks of Belarus today.

LN: You have entered the annals of history as the man who organized the meeting that dissolved the Soviet Union. You were cosignatory of the so-called Biełavieža Agreements, which formed into being the Commonwealth of Independent States.

What did you have in mind when you invited then Russian president Boris Yeltsin and Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk to Belarus' Biełavieža preserve ?

S.Š.: It was our original intent to tackle economic problems emanating from the dependence of Ukraine and Belarus on Russian raw materials. The absence of macro-economic stability at the time created many problems in the wake of Russia's liberalization experiments. Frankly, our greatest concern was just to survive the coming winter.

For all intents and purposes, at the time of signing of the Biełavieža agreements, the Soviet Union had already ceased to exist; it was not something that could be governed as a state. At Biełavieža, we simply codified this fact — and sought a way to prevent its breakup following, say the Yugoslav scenario,

LN: How can Putin's government exert influence on the situation in Belarus ?

S.Š.: Belarus' antireform economics, locally referred to as the "third way", continue to sink the country into poverty. Last year, the inflation rate reached 350%; in the first six months of 2000 alone, it was 56%. Clearly, doing things the "third way" is idiotic. Mrs. Thatcher saw this in the earliest days of perestroika and told Gorbachev so. I particularly like this quote. And in spite of the fact that Belarus' population is among the most highly educated in Europe, especially in the technical realm, Mrs. Thatcher's prophecy proved true: Belarus os well on its way to becoming a third world country. A centrally directed economy prevails — with more than 80% of property still belonging to the state.

Among the uneducated masses, Putin's popularity in Belarus is much higher than Łukašenka's. Thus, six agreements of friendship and unification with Russia have already been signed — and plans are being made for a seventh. Under the present economic circumstances, this is ridiculous. Russian capital in Belarus does whatever it likes and it plays according to Russian rules. By contrast, Belarusian and foreign capital interests are humiliated and downtrodden. They are reduced to playing corruption games and bribing officials in order to ensure their survival.

LN.: In your opinion, what factors can influence the future of Łukašenka's regime ? Is it a question primarily of politics or economic and social problems ?

S.Š.: One cannot assume that deterioration in a country's economy will inevitably result in social upheaval. Belarus has survived without such upheaval even under considerably worse economic circumstances. Today, the situation is somewhat different, however, and we have an advantage because the regime today cannot isolate the country from the rest of the world.

The Belarusian people see how other people live; we are not in Cuba but in the center of Europe. Hence, some enterprising people try to cope. They avail them selves of limited existing opportunities and try to conduct simultaneous "shadow economies." Failing that, they launch businesses abroad. Those in utterly dire straits simply choose to leave the country.

This is why I see the future in nonviolent, political methods of resistance. Presidential elections are scheduled for the next year (2001) and the regime has no choice but to conduct them. This situation gives us a certain hopefulness that matters might change for the better, They may of course also get worse.

We are fortunate in the fact that Łukašenka is basically an uneducated person.. He'll pick up an idea, repeat it — then start to correct himself. In a single speech, he might espouse both communist and free-market slogans. This is pure populism. Especially in economics, Łukašenka is woefully uneducated.. So the coming presidential election does afford us some hope. We don't however know who else might enter the race. Another candidate, one financed either by Russia or the West, might prove to be even more dangerous to Belarus than Łukašenka.

LN.: There is considerable concern regarding the opposition's unity. Will the opposition be able to preserve unity on the eve of the election ?

S.Š.: The opposition is united on one vitally important issue — resistance to Łukašenka's regime. Further unity is neither possible nor even necessary. The opposition in Belarus today includes even communists, with whom the democrats cannot even agree on a common program of reforms. Still, including them in our ranks is not a mistake, in my opinion.

A problem of "unity" exists somewhere altogether different: there is no unified western policy with regard to Belarus . The West does not enforce democratic standards; it only seems concerned with the illusion of such standards.

Even the Czech Republic last year was guilty of salvaging Łukašenka's regime — and this, in a manner we consider shameful. In order to support its own agriculture, the Czech Republic granted Belarus credits for the purchase of Czech grain. The Czechs did so in spite of the fact that the Belarusian regime can clearly use these credits for the purchase of arms and the sale of the Czech grain to Russia. This step provided great support for Lukasenk`s regime at the time when it was gasping for air.

LN.: The West also takes into account Russia's position ....

S.S.: Certainly. And I would like to add that the pragmatic goals of many western countries are not at all compatible with justice and the renewal of Belarus' independence. The West is indifferent to us. From an economic standpoint, Belarus interests them very little. Only two western countries are an exception — the US and Poland. These maintain positions of principle in all aspects regarding Belarus.

LN.: If the present situation in Belarus continues, pressures will increase to solve the problem by any means possible.

S.Š.: I repeat:: Although the West declares its adherence to the principles of democracy , it does little in the form of action. Take the OSCE, for example: its efforts have led nowhere. I understand that they are seeking to find a solution by peaceful means. But at the end of the day, they are supporting a regime that has in the past cavalierly expelled foreign diplomats, unapologetically shot down western balloonists and brazenly labeled foreign emissaries as spies. Meanwhile, the West stubbornly keeps trying to reeducate such a regime. This is nonsense.

Russia's behavior, by contrast, is very cynical. It is interested in Belarus only as a colony on its western border. The Russian non-government council for Foreign and Defense Policy, headed by Sergei Karaganov, clearly formulated this goal. It warned that national self-awareness in Belarus is on the rise. This state of affairs makes it necessary for Russia to invest large sums of money in Belarus to speed up the integration process, lest it be too late and too expensive to do so.

Karlos Sherman: "If you have brains, do not leave your country, but change it!"

By Anna Leshkevich

A son of a Belarusian immigrant and a native Indian, Karlos Sherman was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, and did his studies in Buenos-Aires, Argentina. He traveled all across South America, part of Europe and Northern Africa. He translated from Spanish into Russian and Belarusian over 20 books. He wrote many himself, his last book being dedicated to American Indians. Karlos have been living in Minsk since mid-50ies. He's married, has children and grandchildren. Works as the vice-president of the Belarusian PEN-center. Apart from Spanish, Russian and Belarusian, he speaks Italian and French.

"You want to emigrate? " — Karlos asked me with a certain note of irritation in his voice. "What about if we all move out and leave Belarus to Lukashenka? If you say you're smart, stay here and change life in your home country. Otherwise, you'll let the country get ruined even more.

Karlos Grigorievich, why have you returned to Belarus?

My father left Western Belarus for Argentina in search of a better life. Ever since he has been always homesick. When my mother took out a huge golden Dorado fish from the oven, he would tell her: "Do you call it 'fish' here? Then you haven't eaten the tench!" My mother used always to buy apples in Rio-Negro — very delicious — while my dad would always recall "byely naive " At last, in the mid-fifties, both my parents returned to Belarus. Soon I followed them too.

Did you have a choice to move or stay at home?

I didn't have a choice. When your parents tell you to do something, you're supposed to obey. That's the matter of upbringing, I guess. I had everything in Argentina: a job, friends, sunshine and the ocean. I traveled every day in a tram, from the window of which I could admire the blue waters of a lagoon. But parents are more important.

Is it because of some religious background?
Religion is different. I separate religion and church. The temple is inside of me, so I random go to a church.

Remember Akhmatova: "They changed my life. It goes another way now" Do these lines speak of you? No, I'm living my own life. I'd put it this way: my father had made a mistake by having left Belarus for Argentina. I repeated his mistake, as well. I would never recommend anyone to emigrate, no matter what the circumstances. That's the wound, which cannot be healed with time.

You made yourself a living sacrifice?
Not really. I didn't live only for my parents. I simply paid my tribute to them and lived my own life. When I found myself in a new environment, I simply continued working and exploring it.

Were you stunned by the way the things were here?
What could we know then about our homeland? We were regularly provided with the magazine "Farmer" featuring photos of well-fed Russian women and the magazine "The Soviet Union," printed on high quality Finnish paper. But bear in mind I didn't come from the USA but from Argentina, where homegrown dictators were also in abundance. I lived through the times of dictator Peron's reign in Argentina, heard about dictator Gonzalez Videl of Chili, who banished Pablo Neruda. We shouldn't fear dictators, but rather oppose them.

Do you want to emigrate?
You know, frustration over our country is our main problem these days. No, I don't want to. Nor does my family. I'm in love with Belarus. Somehow many believe that there's nothing you can do to change here. That's just not true. One can do things even in some Central African regions, populated by savage cannibal tribes!

All Belarus citizens owe respect toward their country, is that what you're saying?
Surely. That's their Motherland.

Is it something to be estimated above one's personal life?
Our life needs to be put in conformity with this our duty.

What do we owe to the nation which denies independence and welcomes the disbanding of Parliament?
You see, two hundred years of imperial Russia's yoke couldn't but cast its shadow on today's events. Then there was that war with Poland. Belarusians' national identity was eradicated. Let's take Jamaica, for example. The Spanish came over and brought their language and religion. Twenty years later, a Jamaican young man tells a Jamaican young lady that he loves her —in Spanish, rather than in his native language. Then there came the Britons and destroyed everything Spanish. In 20 years' time an average Jamaican guy is a Protestant and speaks English. Something similar has happened to Belarus. The Belarusian language was forbidden, its history has been numerously rewritten. They wiped off people's memory. And don't be surprised now that the people deny their own culture.

Fine, we have this dreadful past — two hundred years of slavery. But we also have modern trends — economic globalization, cultural integration, et cetera. Any normal person would like to live in a civilized world right now, rather than go through many trials and sorrows on his way to a better future. So what are we supposed to do?
Living on the edge is something you don't want to choose. It's not us who have reached the edge. We had been pushed there by force, which is something totally different. First, we got to realize what happened and then we'll be able to get ourselves out of the ditch. The road to the civilized world lies through normal independence, friendly relations with all countries, Russia included, and neutrality. Belarus originally was a European country and it needs to follow the European path —healthy trade relations, advanced science and the existence of intelligentsia.

If I feel like reading some good poetry, I take a book by Akhmatova, rather than that of the Belarusian poets. When my daughter grew up, I reread the "Station controller" by Pushkin, as he learned more about adolescents than anyone before or after him. The Russian language gives more food to my soul than the Belarusian one. I'm not saying that's good, but that's just the way it is. Meanwhile, many believe that our national revival can only be brought about if we restore our national language.
Independence is first and foremost a political, economic and cultural phenomenon. To me the national identity, economy and politics are all equally important. Vaclav Havel is a humanist, but he has concentrated on economy, not forgetting politics and culture. And you know the result. Language problems are more difficult to resolve. Our Belarusian PEN-Center is involved in the international program on linguistic rights. We expect to pass the requirements of the international convention on the issue, which would lift the problem of linguistic minority and majority. There's the language of the community. "Community" stands for the country, history and territory of residence. And there are also groups of individuals who desire to study their native language. The Russian language is in the same dire straights in the present-day Belarus as the Belarusian one. It's very poor and primitive here. It's sort of a mixture of the two, as I call it. That's a usual problem of all the aboriginal tribes. Finally, the problem of rights' harmonization. If the problem gets resolved, no one will force you to speak Russian or Belarusian. This has to happen on the level of mutual respect and harmony. The state is responsible for sound language development on its territory. (There are two official languages in Finland and, nonetheless, the true independence prevails)

Some assume that if it weren't for the native language of the Baltic States, they would have never acquired sovereignty.
The Baltic region was lucky that the Soviets came there late. The language there fulfilled the protective function. Even at Soviet times you could ask someone in Tallinn in Russian and get no response. Today they would gladly answer you — Russians no longer pose any threat to Estonians. It's all different now.

Do we have an elite of intellectuals here?
We do, but they are very few. After the dissolution of the USSR, there were 600 members of the Writers' Union. When in 1989 Ales Adamovich, Vasil Bykau and I attempted to set up a Belarusian PEN-Center, we could hardly get 20 people involved. Of course, Svetlana Aleksiyevich, Ryhor Baradulin and Ales Razanau are our national heroes, but they are too few to fulfill their historic function of the moment. Fortunately, we are getting more of the young names, especially young essay writers. That's encouraging. But we need to gain more time. I'm convinced that time is working for the benefit of our independence.

Did you feel euphoria during Gorbachov's perestroika?
You bet I did. But I came back to my senses when I saw on TV how they made fun of Sakharov. That was disgusting. Then there followed the Karabakh tragedy. The Soviet system had potential reserves, also financial. Belarus is sort of a Russian testing ground. Everything that proves to be successful here is soon being tried in Russia. I'm alarmed at the ongoing processes there. It's very disturbing, let me tell you.

Do we have a chance for revival?
We do. But to my regret we don't have our Havel, Valensa, Sakharov or even Yeltsin.

But if we never have appropriate figures at the right times, doesn't that mean we are a doomed nation?
They will emerge. It's just that we're more humiliated at this time of transition. And we need more time. Today I feel as though I was in Argentina during Peron's rule. But I'm positive that we'll get democracy reinstituted here. Though it will not come cheaply. It'll cost us dearly.

NOTE: Belarusian PEN-Center is a nongovernmental, nonprofit, nonpolitical organization of writers, part of the International PEN-club. It is a professional union of writers, set up to promote intellectual cooperation, whose branches spread over 100 states of the world. The club was founded back in 1921 in London. (President of the Belarusian PEN-Center is Vasil Bykau.)

[*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Charter 97— File: November 2000]

ECONOMY

Belarusian Entrepreneurs and NGO Leaders Learning U.S. Market Economics

]By Art Turevich

Nine business entrepreneurs from Bierascie (Brest) and Horadnia (Grodno) and ten NGO leaders from Miensk, Belarus, visited the U.S. to work and live with local American families in Roanoke, Lynchburg and Bedford, Virginia, from October 18 to November 18. The professionals were participants in the U.S. Department of State's Community Connections program, which provides home stay-based, three-to-five week practical training opportunities in the U.S.

The Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs awarded a grant to Legacy International to host the Belarusian groups. According to the host, despite an especially difficult and challenging economic and political climate in Belarus, members of both groups were professional and receptive to learning new methods and approaches during their stay. Their individual internships were with companies similar to their own.

The business group interns were exposed to many aspects of U.S. business including: efficiency in systems of delivery, pricing, budgeting, quality control, and personnel management; the role of the manager; how managers and workers alike work hard; individual initiative and the sense of unlimited opportunity; specialization of U.S. professions and companies; and the extent of computerization.

The NGO program group set their own learning goals so that training and exposure be focused on practical issues that they could translate to their own situations. The program included a comprehensive overview of the nonprofit structure in the US, exploring national and international non-profits and small local organizations. Training topics included: fundraising and management structure, the role of non-profits in the US, their relationship with the government, and strategic planning. The interns were exposed to such new concepts as the difference between a mission statement and an organizations vision; using focus groups for research and testing; job descriptions and personnel reviews; concepts of teamwork; the concept that handicapped people are beneficial members of society and have rights.

Both groups benefited from the overlap of the NGO and business programs. In Belarus, the two sectors interact little, if at all. On two occasions, the two groups were brought together so that they could interact and begin to build a common understanding between them. They were shown the ways business and nonprofits work together in the US, stressing the responsibility both sectors have in strengthening the country.

(**Source:** *Charter '97, International League for Human Rights and Legacy International*

BELARUSIANS ABROAD

Rigged Parliamentary Elections in Belarus

Following is a press release of the Coalition in Defense of Democracy and Human Rights in Belarus, Highland Park, New Jersey, USA, November 1, 2000.

The Coalition in Defense of Democracy and Human Rights in Belarus calls attention to the fact that the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Belarus, held in October 2000, were marked by blatant violations of democratic principles, irregularities in voting procedures and falsification of the ballot. Among the most egregious violations of the electoral code, reported by informal observers, were the following:

1) compulsory early voting in military units and colleges;
2) stuffing of ballot boxes with invalid voting bulletins to hike up the electorate's participation in the face of the boycott of the elections by the democratic opposition;
3) reduction of the lists of eligible voters in order to "increase" the percentage of those who came to voting places; and
4) at many voting stations, preventing NGO observers from attending the vote count and denying them official reports on voting results.

Thus, the newly "elected" Chamber of Delegates (the lower house of the National Assembly of Belarus) is a sham parliament, similar to the previous one that rubber-stamped decrees and orders of the strongman Alexander Lukashenka. This year's parliamentary elections do not bode well for the upcoming presidential contest in Belarus that will be held next year, and the international community has taken note of it. The latest distortion by the Belarusian government of the voting process has been recognized as such by a number of international agencies and foreign ministries, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the U.S. Government.

NEWS from PRAGUE (Czech Republic)

The Czech "People in Need" foundation hosted several representatives of Belarus' political opposition in Prague from December 10-14, 2000

Among the invited guests were:

Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič — Chairman of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (and, from 1991-1994, Chairman of the 12th Supreme Soviet)

Vincuk Viačorka — Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front and of the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces

Anatol Labiedzka — Chairman of the United Civic Party and vice-chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet (disbanded by the present regime)

Aleś Bialacki — Chairman of the Assembly of Belarusian Non-governmental Organizations

Aleś Michalevič — Chairman of the Belarusian Youth Information center

On 13 December, the guests from Belarus had a meeting with Czech president Vaclav Havel, who assured the group of his support and applauded plans for the nomination of a single opposition candidate in the 2001 presidential election.

Given the deterioration of human rights in Belarus and the particularly repressive measures against the opposition, the need to support democratic forces in Belarus is more pressing then ever, Havel said.

He also pledged his readiness to discuss Belarus' problems with other world leaders.

The Belarusian delegates also had formal meetings with:
* members of Czech Senate committees of foreign affairs and defense;
* Czech deputy foreign minister Martin Palous;
* Czech Commissioner for Human Rights Petr Uhl; and
* members of the Czech parliament

In addition, they met informally with Czech Senate chairman Petr Pithart, who promised future coordination with Belarusian opposition in international structures such as Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and NATO. In those structures where Belarus' legally elected 13th Supreme Soviet has no delegates, its interests will be defended by Czech parliamentarians. It was also stated that the Czech parliament is prepared to send its observers to monitor the 2001 presidential election in Belarus.

Finally, on December 13, 2000, the Belarusian opposition leaders discussed the present situation in their country with students of Prague's Charles University.

NEWS BRIEFS

CHRONICLE of EVENTS

October 15, 2000

FIRST ROUND OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

About 5,500 domestic election observers worked at 3,500 polling stations during the first round and asserted that the required 50 percent threshold was not met in more than a third of the districts. According to the observers, the nationwide turnout was about 40 percent, rather than the 60 percent claimed by the regime. The observers documented 80 various ways employed by the electoral officials to manipulate the vote count. Citing interference with the judiciary and pro-government bias in the state-controlled media, the U.S., EU, and OSCE agreed that the first round of voting did not meet international standards for democratic elections and decided not to send observers to the runoff.

No candidate had won more than half the votes cast. (Belapan, Reuters, October 29-31)

October 29, 2000

SECOND ROUND OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Runoff votes in a Belarusian rigged parliamentary election were held in 56 Belarusian districts. The election was seen by many local and international observers as a showdown before next years presidential poll. After the first round of the elections, the opposition parties accused the regime of election fraud in favor of backers of Lukashenko and decided to boycott the October 29 runoff.

On October 29, the Minsk authorities, apparently stung by a low turnout in the first round, organized street fairs offering residents cheap vegetables and fruits, while radio and television called on voters to turn up at polling stations. The elections took place calmly and we have had no complaints, unlike the first round, Lydia Yermoshina, Chair of the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda, told journalists at October 30 press conference in Minsk. *Yermoshina claimed turnout in the second round* was 52.64 percent. [Election rules stipulate that 50 percent of eligible voters must cast ballots in the first round of parliamentary elections to make them valid and at least 25 percent must participate to make the runoff election valid.-Ed.]. She said that after runoff vote, a total of 97 deputies had been elected to the 110-seat House of Representatives. The total included 56 members, who won seats during the runoff. Repeat polls will be held in 13 constituencies where the low turnout invalidated the result, Yermoshina said. The new Chamber of Representatives, which convenes on November 27, will have many new faces, with only about 30 lawmakers from the previous parliament. (Belapan, Reuters, October 29-31)

November 12, 2000

POLICE DISPERSE YOUTH MARCH IN MINSK, ARREST 100 PEOPLE

Riot police on 12 November dispersed a crowd of several hundred youths who were marching in Minsk under the slogan "[We Want] Changes!" The march, organized by a coalition of non-state youth groups, had been banned by the city authorities. Belapan reported that the Minsk police arrested some 100 participants. "Young people do not want to live in a country of lies and violence, of deceit and fear, of servile mentality and dictatorship," Pavel Sevyarynets, head of the Youth Front, told journalists before the demonstration. The same day, youth groups staged similar protests against the ruling regime in 25 Belarusian cities, albeit on a smaller scale. Arrests were reported in Hrodna, western Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 13)

November 27, 2000

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SACKS TOP SECURITY OFFICIALS

Alyaksandr Lukashenka has dismissed KGB Chairman Uladzimir Matskevich, Security Council Chairman Viktor Sheyman, and Prosecutor-General Aleh Bazhelka, Interfax reported on 27 November. Presidential spokesman Mikalay Barysevich told Reuters that those officials were fired "in connection with transfers to other jobs." He added, however, that he does not rule out that "this reaction by the president reflects his dissatisfaction that many important [investigation] cases have dragged on for too long without justification," Barysevich added. Leanid Yeryn, chief of the presidential security service, is new KGB head, while Foreign Minister Ural Latypau has been appointed Security Council secretary and presidential aide Mikhail Khvastou is to take over the foreign portfolio. The Charter-97 website commented that Lukashenka has accomplished "yet another state coup." The website noted that key posts in Belarus are now in the hands of "Russia's open proteges in Lukashenka's entourage." Belarus's premier, deputy premiers, power ministers, a number of deputy ministers, and speaker of the Chamber of Representatives are all Russian-born. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 27)

November 30, 2000

BELARUS HOSTS PUTIN, CIS SUMMIT

Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin met in Minsk in the latest of their periodic attempts to put substance into a long-standing plan to merge their nations, reported Belapan. Putin dashed prospects for speedy progress on a proposed merger with Belarus, telling Lukashenko that the project required careful thought. The two leaders signed another accord to move toward using the Russian ruble in both countries by 2005 and establishing a joint currency by 2008. Putin appeared to pour cold water on Lukashenka's long-held desire for the union to assume a greater political role. The creation of a union state demands the voluntary renunciation of a certain amount of sovereignty, so we first need to *think* 100 or 1000 times and only then act, Putin told reporters. Lukashenko said the leaders had reached the joint opinion that we should integrate on an economic basis. Unlike political decisions, we agreed on economic issues a long time ago, the Belarusian leader added.

On December 1, Minsk also hosted a summit of the failing Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), reported

Interfax. The heads of 11 ex-Soviet states focused on finding an antidote to religious and political extremism which they say is threatening the region. Russia, waging its second war in the separatist and largely Muslim region of Chechnya, has also been increasingly anxious about the spread of militant Islam in Central Asia, seen by many as Moscow's soft underbelly. Many leaders have said they expect little from the group, which has failed to implement most of its decisions since its was created after Soviet rule collapsed. (Belapan, November 30-Interfax, December 1)

November 30, 2000

BELARUS, RUSSIA AGREE ON RUSSIAN RUBLE AS UNION CURRENCY IN 2005

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Belarusian counterpart, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, meeting in Minsk on 30 November, endorsed a draft accord on the introduction in 2005 of the Russian ruble as the Belarus-Russia Union's single currency and the establishment of a single money-printing center. Lukashenka told journalists that Russia will provide loans to help stabilize the Belarusian ruble before the monetary merger, but he did not disclose the sum. Putin warned Lukashenka that the development of the union means its members will have to give up part of their sovereignty. "We want the union state's bodies to have [real] powers, and this requires renouncing some part of sovereignty. This is a very subtle process: any decision in this sphere cannot be made without public consent. It cannot be delayed but it is also unnecessary to make hasty decisions," Belapan quoted Putin as saying. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 1)

December 10-14, 2000

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BELARUSIAN POLITICAL OPPOSITION VISIT PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

Members of the delegation:

Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič — Chairman of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (and, from 1991-1994, Chairman of the 12th Supreme Soviet)

Vincuk Viačorka — Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front and of the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces

Anatol Labiedzka — Chairman of the United Civic Party and vice-chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet (disbanded by the present regime)

Aleś Bialacki — Chairman of the Assembly of Belarusian Non-governmental Organizations

Aleś Michalevič — Chairman of the Belarusian Youth Information center

Main purpose of visit:

— to secure the support of the Czech Republic for democratic change in Belarus;

— to secure Czech support in European and international structure;

— to secure a promise from the Czech parliament to send observers to the 2001 presidential election in Belarus

December 27, 2000

MINSK TIES BELARUS CURRENCY TO RUSSIAN RUBLE. The Belarusian government announced on 27 December that Minsk will keep its national ruble within a set fluctuation band against the Russian ruble as of 1 January, Russian and Western agencies reported. Minsk will allow its currency to fall no more than 3 percent in value against the Russian ruble each month. Currently, it has been falling at the rate of about 5 percent a month. On the same day, Russian President Vladimir Putin sent to the Duma the 30 November 2000 agreement calling for the introduction of a single currency once the two countries form a union state, ITAR-TASS reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 29)

POLITICS (Opposition)

OPPOSITION CONTESTS GOVERNMENT TURNOUT FIGURE — At a late-night October 15 news conference in Minsk, opposition leaders contested the official turnout figures, citing numerous violations and claiming electoral fraud, reported Belapan. Opposition leaders pointed out that some 5,000 independent observers set the overall turnout figure at no more than 45 percent, compared to the official count of 60 percent. The opposition will file a report of violations witnessed by independent monitors, such as crossing out names from voter lists and forcing people to go to the polls. In one polling station in Minsk, authorities cut more than 400 names from the voter rolls, thus artificially inflating the turnout, Ales Beliatsky, head of Viasna Human Rights Center said. In Grodno, police summoned voters to polling stations, he said. "We already have hundreds of documents and will have more proving that the elections in Belarus were invalid," Beliatsky said. "The regime falsified about 15-20 percent of votes in each district," said Vintsuk Viachorka, chair of the BPF Adradzhenne. He added that the vote was the "first stage of the presidential election, which the opposition won." "We hope to see Belarus without Lukashenko in 2001," Viachorka concluded. "The opposition won this election. Alexander Grigoryevich [Lukashenko] would have flopped had the presidential election taken place today," said Anatoly Lebedko, chair of the United Civic Party. (Belapan, October 16)

COMMITTEE ON ELECTION OBSERVATION REPORTS MASS VIOLATIONS — On October 18, Mechislav Grib, chair of the Coordinating Committee on Observation of Elections, announced that voter turnout in the first round of the parliamentary was far below the required 50 per cent in 31 districts, as opposed to 13 declared by the authorities. According to the Committee, voter turnout was below the required 50 per cent in all 18 Minsk‰ districts, while the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda invalidated the election results only in three of them. Grib told reporters that the local election commissions arbitrarily shortened and extended lists of registered voters to secure the desired result. As a result, officially announced turnout figures for Minsk's districts were from 44 to 47 per cent on the evening of October 15 and jumped up to 53 per cent the next day. Grib said that about 6,000 observers, sent by the Committee to monitor the voting process, reported about 5,000 irregularities. Grib said that the Committee will not observe the second round because international organizations have already declared that the election fell short of meeting the minimum requirements for free and fair vote. (Belapan, October 18)

CHARTER 97 CRITICIZES ELECTION — On October 18, Vladimir Kobets, activist from Charter 97, a civic organization, which is a partner of the International League for Human Rights, informed the OSCE Implementation Meeting held on October 17 in Warsaw, that the united democratic opposition of Belarus has prepared a report on the parliamentary election held on October 15, which were "accompanied by gross violations of electoral law." Following are the excerpts from his statement:

" Approximately six thousand local independent observers invited by the united opposition witnessed unprecedented falsification of this election's results. The following violations have been the most typical:

1. Reduction of numbers of registered voters -- flagrant elimination of voter registration of entire blocks -- in order to *inflate voting participation numbers in the government's favor*, which began on the afternoon of October 15. One telling

fact is the twofold increase in voting participation numbers during the last hour of the election. 2. Psychological pressure exerted on voters before and on the day of election (threats of expulsion from university, dormitory, hospital, etc.). 3. Destruction of unused ballots without counting them, thus making it impossible to determine the real number of votes. 4. Participation of members of executive bodies in counting votes. 5. Refusal of heads of district election commission to make public the pre-election results. 6. Permission to vote with any kind of ID whatsoever (student ID's, pensioners' ID, etc.) thus violating the electoral code rule which requires a passport or a similar document. 7. Cases of a single person presenting passports of several others and being allowed to vote on their behalf, e.g., family voting."

"According to the independent observers‰ count, during the elections, the necessary number of votes (50 percent plus one) were received only in 52 of 110 districts. Even in those districts, however, these numbers were artificially created by reducing the number of voters. 20 percent of all votes cast were against all candidates, a fact explained by people's fear of NOT participating in the elections."

(Charter 97-ILHR, October 18)

...WHILE SUPREME SOVIET SPEAKER CALLS FOR INTERIM GOVERNMENT — Supreme Soviet speaker Syamyon Sharetski, currently in exile in Lithuania, said in a statement on 17 October that the Supreme Soviet remains Belarus's only legitimate legislative body, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. According to Sharetski, in order to find a way for Belarus out of its current situation, the Supreme Soviet needs to form a "provisional government of national trust to replace the bankrupt group of persons who are remaining illegally in power and working to liquidate Belarus's independence." Sharetski expressed his readiness to launch negotiations with all forces interested in putting Belarus back on the democratic path of development. He called the 15 October ballot an "act of a social tragicomedy," saying the voting showed that "the dictatorial regime has already lost the support of the people who, morally humiliated and driven into poverty, simply ignored the so-called elections." (RFE/RL Newsline, October 18)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION MEETS EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP — On November 15-19, the delegation of the Belarusian united opposition, which included Amb. Andrei Sannikov, former Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus and International Coordinator of Charter 97; Vintsuk Viachorka, chair of the BPF Adradzhenne; Anatoly Lebedko, chair of the Belarusian United Civic Party; and Anatoly Korol, deputy chair of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party, held a series of meetings with the European high ranking officials, during which they discussed the political situation in Belarus and the prospects for the EU's cooperation with the Belarusian democratic forces. (Charter 97, November 17)

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONISTS CLAIM TO HAVE WESTERN SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENTIAL POLL —Alyaksey Karol, Anatol Lyabedzka, Andrey Sannikau, and Vintsuk Vyachorka toured European capitals last week to inform the West about the situation in Belarus and seek support for the country's democratization. Vyachorka told journalists that the delegation appealed to the West to persuade Russia "not to save Lukashenka or impose its own [presidential] candidate" in next year's presidential elections in Belarus. Sannikau said the Western politicians they met pledged that "Europe will not only support but also defend" a single candidate of the united democratic opposition in the 2001 presidential ballot, Belapan reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, October 22)

BELARUSIAN EX-PREMIER WITHDRAWS FROM ELECTIONS BECAUSE OF 'MANIPULATIONS'... — Mikhail Chyhir has withdrawn his candidacy from the 29 October second round of the legislative elections, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 24 October. Chyhir sent a message to the Central Electoral Commission accusing the authorities of using "dirty techniques" and "manipulations" against him. Chyhir said that in the 15 October first round, turnout in his constituency was below 47 percent, but the district electoral commission subsequently shortened the list of registered voters by some 6,000 and reported to the Central Electoral Commission that the poll was valid. "We will have the same parliament as before, which will work... like the KGB; we will not know either what they adopt there or for what they vote," Chyhir commented. According to official results, Chyhir came second after Natalya Masherava, the daughter of Belarus's Soviet-era leader Pyotr Masherau.(RFE/RL Newsline, October 25)

...WHILE ANOTHER CANDIDATE LURED INTO RESIGNING BY AUTHORITIES — Eduard Naryshkin, a plant director from Babruysk (Mahileu Oblast), has pulled out of the legislative ballot, leaving former Chamber of Representatives deputy Alyaksandr Shpileuski to compete for the legislative seat in Babruysk, Belapan reported on 24 October. Naryshkin obtained 44 percent of the vote on 15 October, while Shpileuski came second with 22 percent backing. However, the Babruysk City Council and the Babruysk City Executive Committee pledged to nominate Naryshkin as member of the Council of the Republic (the upper house of the National Assembly) in exchange for pulling out. In theory, members of the Council of the Republic are elected in a secret ballot, but RFE/RL's correspondent from Mahileu suggested that Naryshkin can be sure he will be elected. Four years ago, a Mahileu newspaper published the names of oblast "senators" ahead of their allegedly free and fair election.(RFE/RL Newsline, October 25

BELARUSIAN ADMINISTRATION SHAKE-UP SEEN AS GROUNDWORK FOR ELECTION CAMPAIGN — According to Yury Khadyka from the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), the 27 November shake-up of the security apparatus can be seen as Lukashenka's preparation for next year's presidential campaign. Khadyka told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service that Lukashenka needs new security officials who would have "fewer levers" in politics and be more prepared to obey his orders. BNF exiled leader Zyanon Paznyak commented that Lukashenka is seeking to thwart Moscow from replacing him with a Belarusian "Vojislav Kostunica" and therefore fires any Belarusian-born official whom Moscow could possibly field as his challenger in the presidential elections. Human rights activist Hary Pahanyayla told Belapan that in the run-up to the presidential campaign, Lukashenka intends to conceal the truth about the disappearance of Zakharanka, Hanchar, and Zavadski and has appointed officials who will help him achieve that goal. (RFE/RL Newsline, November 28)

OPPOSITION LEADER VS. DICTATOR — Nasha Svaboda reported on November 20 that the Partizansky District Court of Minsk refused to hear a defamation suit filed by Anatoly Lebedko, chair of the opposition United Civic Party, against Alexander Lukashenko, on the grounds that the defendant does not reside in the Partizansky district. [On October 15, in a surreal monologue at a Minsk polling station, Alexander Lukashenko accused Lebedko of receiving financial assistance from the OSCE AMG in Belarus (See Belarus Update Vol. 3, No. 43). Lebedko demanded from the Belarusian leader to produce any evidence to support the accusations.-Ed.] Commenting on the courts decision to reject his suit, the

opposition leader said that as a Belarusian citizen he wants to know the legal residence of the leader of the country in order to sue him in court. (Nasha Svaboda, November 20)

EX-PRIME MINISTER TO CHALLENGE LUKASHENKO IN ELECTION — On December 5, Mikhail Chigir, former Belarusian prime minister, now active in opposition, confirmed his readiness to challenge Alexander Lukashenko in next year's presidential election, which according to Lydia Yermoshina, Chair of the Central Commission for Elections and National Referenda, will be held in September 2001. The announcement came right after the Belarusian Supreme Court vacated a lower court judgment against him for alleged abuse of power and returned the case for further investigation on the grounds that it had been incomplete, reported Belapan. You may congratulate me -- I am a free man now, enjoy all civil rights, including the right to register as a presidential candidate, which I will do in 2001, Chigir told Reuters. [On May 19, the Minsk City Court had found Chigir guilty of criminal negligence and abuse of power resulting in serious damage to the state budget under Articles 167-168 of the Belarusian Criminal Code and sentenced him to three years in prison with a two-year reprieve (See Belarus Update Vol. 3, No. 21). The former prime minister called the sentence legally absurd and appealed it.-Ed.]. Although a Supreme Court official stressed that the decision does not mean a final acquittal yet, the ex-premier shrugged this off. To send the case back to the prosecutors office for further investigation means quietly to bury this story without recognizing anyone's guilt, he said. In October, despite the decision of the Congress of Belarusian Democratic Forces to boycott the parliamentary election, Chigir ran for a parliamentary seat but quit the fight after a first round, accusing the authorities of fraud. (Interfax-Reuters, December 6)

OPPOSITION PARTY SAYS BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PREPARING TO KEEP POWER BY FORCE — According to the United Civic Party (AHP), President Lukashenka's televised address to the KGB leadership on 28 November was "the public presentation of a plan to stay in power by force," Belapan reported on 4 November. In his address, Lukashenka urged the KGB to spy more efficiently on foreign diplomats in Belarus (see "RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report," 5 December 2000) and promised to take "even tougher" measures to deal with the opposition before the presidential elections. He also warned the KGB about what he called NATO's plans to attack Belarus. "Such conclusions may befit a block hooligan or an extremist group member [but not] a high-ranking statesman," AHP Chairman Anatol Lyabedzka commented. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 5)

DEMOCRATIC PARTIES UNITE AHEAD OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION — On December 8-9, the United Civic Party and the BPF Adradzhenne, the two largest opposition parties, held separate meetings in Minsk to discuss the political situation in the country ahead of the next year presidential election. Both parties supported the November 2 resolution adopted by the Coordinating Council of the Belarusian Democratic Forces to nominate a single democratic candidate for the presidency."Today we find ourselves on the doorstep of the political campaign, which may bring a real change of the existing situation in the country," Vintsuk Viachorka said. "We tested our abilities by holding national political mass actions and we are ready to challenge Lukashenko in next years election." The United Civic Party nominated Mikhail Chigir, Pavel Kozlovsky, Anatoly Lebedko, and Semyon Domash as potential candidates from the opposition, from whom the Council may choose one. (Charter 97, December 12)

OPPOSITION DEMANDS MEDIA ACCESS DURING 2001 ELECTION — The Coordinating Council of the Belarusian Democratic Forces has adopted a memorandum on media coverage of the next years presidential election, which demands the equal access for the opposition, reported Belapan. The document points out that this past fall the Lukashenko government failed to provide the democratic opposition with fair access to state-controlled television and radio in a violation of the Belarusian law and international commitments. Unfair restrictions, along with the denial of registration to many opposition candidates, detentions and fines of individuals advocating a boycott of the election, harassment and slander of the opposition, rampant governmental interference in the election process, and extensive irregularities on election day itself, virtually ensured that the vote was not free, fair and transparent. The Council noted that in order to comply with the four OSCE conditions, the government should make the electoral process more transparent, provide fair access of political parties to the state-run media, implement actual separation of powers, lift restrictions against opposition figures, and cease harassment and persecution for political reasons. The Council also demanded the authorities relinquish their monopoly over the press, maintained either through ownership of nearly all printing and broadcasting facilities and through control of the distribution of all print media through official outlets. The Council urged that equal economic conditions be created for the government-controlled and private media, and declare a moratorium on the introduction of changes into the media law until the 2001 presidential election. (Belapan, December 21

CHIGIR URGES RUSSIA TO SUPPORT OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE — On December 30, in an interview to Belapan, Mikhail Chigir, former Belarusian prime minister, now active in opposition, said that the decision who should be the next Belarusian president will be made in Moscow. In late December, Chigir visited Moscow and held unofficial meetings with many influential Russian politicians, during which he urged them to support the candidate from the opposition. I tried to persuade the Russian political elite that a change of the Belarusian leadership would not bring a worsening of Russia-Belarus relations, the former Premier said. According to him, very few Russian politicians are aware of the real state of affairs in Belarus because their notion of Belarusian reality is based on information received from official channels. (Belapan, December 30)

POLITICS (Government)

LUKASHENKO VOWS TO WIN NEXT YEAR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION — On October 15, in a surreal monologue at a Minsk polling station, Alexander Lukashenko insisted that the West's refusal to recognize the election, boycotted by the opposition, would unmask its double standards and discredit it in the eyes of the Belarusian people, reported Belapan. He dismissed complaints that the parliamentary vote and the pre-election campaigning leading up to it were undemocratic and monopolized by the state. "We are conducting this election for the people of Belarus, not for the West," said Lukashenko, adding that "boycotting the election is foolish." The Belarusian leader said that he does not need "lectures on democracy from abroad" and that "Belarus is no less democratic than Britain." He described Milosevic as "a patriot of his own country who did the best he could." Lukashenko laughed off suggestions that the ousted Yugoslav leader might seek asylum in Belarus. He also vowed to win the next year presidential election. "The person who will win

is the one who loves his people and his country. Do not worry, I will become the president in 2001, and you can already line up to congratulate me," Lukashenko told journalists, adding that he was joking. The Belarusian leader once again accused Anatoly Lebedko, chair of the United Civic Party, of receiving financial assistance from the West. Lebedko has filed a defamation suit against Lukashenko, demanding from Lukashenko to produce any evidence to support the accusations, reported Interfax. (Belapan, October 16- Interfax, October 20)

LUKASHENKO SAYS POLL "ABSOLUTELY DEMOCRATIC" — On October 18, Alexander Lukashenko declared the widely-criticized general election in the country "absolutely democratic," adding that the outcome proved once again that his policies enjoy popular support. Officials released final results of the election, boycotted by most opposition parties, showing that 43 districts produced a candidate supported by the outright majority, while 54 districts will have to hold a second round. Lukashenko dismissed any notion of a rigged ballot. "Elections in Belarus took place in absolutely democratic fashion. We knew that we would be under scrutiny and viewed with prejudice," Lukashenko was shown saying on state television. "There could be no question of falsification. We knew that even minor shortcomings would be magnified a thousand times by the West," the Belarusian leader said. Lukashenko, shown seated in his office, said it made little difference if a handful of opposition members made it into parliament's lower chamber. "They will have no influence on the parliament," he said. "The election's main outcome is that despite the difficulties, people support current policies." (Belapan, October 19

LUKASHENKA THANKS PUTIN FOR 'GRAND STANCE' ON BELARUSIAN VOTE... — Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka thanked his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in Sochi on 19 October for the latter's support for and congratulations following the "free and democratic" elections to the Chamber of Representatives, Belarusian Television reported. "I want to thank you in front of the journalists for this grand stance that Russia took during our political events. You know how fierce the pressure was," Lukashenka said. Putin interrupted the Belarusian president by remarking, "We do not interfere in internal affairs." "No, you did not interfere, you supported us strongly. Russia has never taken such a definite stance, has never supported Belarus so firmly as now," Lukashenka elaborated (see also Part 1). (RFE/RL Newsline, October 20)

...ACCUSES OSCE OF CHANNELING MONEY TO OPPOSITION — Lukashenka on 18 October told journalists that the Belarusian opposition has received $118 million from the West over the past six years. According to him, some of those funds were transferred to the opposition through the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk. OSCE Minsk mission head Hans Georg Wieck told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service the following day that he does not know anything about the $118 million mentioned by Lukashenka. Moreover, Lukashenka revealed that "his hands are itching" to publish details in "Sovetskaya Belorussiya" about the financing of the Belarusian opposition by the West. He added that once such details are published, the opposition will "disappear as a class." (RFE/RL Newsline, October 20)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT MULLS 'STRATEGIC COOPERATION' WITH PUTIN — Alyaksandr Lukashenka told Belarusian Television on 21 October that he discussed three issues of "strategic cooperation" with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi last week. According to Lukashenka, Putin agreed to give Belarus an oil deposit in Russia to extract oil solely for Belarusian needs. Lukashenka expressed his satisfaction over Russia's recent deal on the transfer of electricity to Western Europe via Belarus, saying that Belarus will receive money for that transit. And he praised Gazprom's intention to build "additional pipelines" through Belarus to supply natural gas to Western Europe. "If we implement this project, we will live twice as well [as now], " Lukashenka noted. He added that the money Minsk receives for the transit of Russian gas to Europe will be sufficient for Belarus to pay for all the gas it consumes. (RFE/RL Newsline, October 23)

LUKASHENKO PROMISES TO SHARE POWER — Speaking to reporters after casting his vote in a runoff in parliamentary elections, Alexander Lukashenko, said he might share some of his powers with the parliament. Lukashenko said that a period of anarchy and chaos, which compelled him to assume sweeping powers was over. It is possible to hand over some of the presidents powers to parliament and certain steps will be taken prior to the presidential election [next year], he said. After the presidential election, we will take an important step. Maybe we will have to initiate a referendum to make the constitution more flexible, the Belarusian leader said. Lukashenko also said to his impoverished compatriots that he intends to trim country's armed forces because we can no longer afford such a huge army. He did not give any details of how large cuts would be or when the changes would be made. Like the military in many former Soviet republics, the Belarusian army is poorly funded. Belarus inherited a large conventional force and nuclear arsenal when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Five years later, Lukashenko gave up the nuclear weapons to Russia. (Belapan, October 30)

... BUT BLASTS MARKET REFORMS — On October 27, a few days before the runoff, in an emotional speech to the students of the agricultural institute in the eastern Mogilev Region, of which he is an alumnus, the Belarusian leader promised to continue the policy of tight state regulation of the economy and ignore market reforms. If we had pressed reforms, we would be eking out a miserable existence, he said, adding that some may not like my policies, but they'd better get used to them. Belarus, he said, could not afford experiments with wild reforms. Lukashenko, once director of a state farm, may have had some trouble persuading a young audience less and less willing to enter the farming sector, where monthly wages as low as $10. Some students told him that farmers now bringing in a reasonable grain harvest after two disastrous crops had little incentive. They sought changes to allow broad private ownership of land. Lukashenko replied that land privatization has been removed from his agenda. Belarus would never be a country of private landowners, he said. The Belarusian leader also denounced as unfair the Wests criticism of the parliamentary election. In the run up to the election, we came under enormous pressure. Now, they are kicking us from below, from above, left and right, he said. As a nation, we deserve our place in the world. We will demand respect for our people and the country. (Reuters, October 28)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT VISITS LIBYA, NOTES 'SIMILAR POSITIONS.' — Alyaksandr Lukashenka met with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in Tripolis on 1 November. "There is no obstacle standing in the way of cooperation between our countries because the two enjoy a free will," Reuters quoted Gaddafi as saying. "Cooperation with Libya is very easy because of our similar positions," Lukashenka responded. According to Interfax, Lukashenka assured Gaddafi that Minsk is ready for "large-scale economic cooperation" with Tripolis, adding that Belarus "has everything necessary for developing such cooperation in various directions." (RFE/RL Newsline, November 2)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT THANKS RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICE FOR HELP — Alyaksandr Lukashenka met with Russian Foreign Intelligence Service chief Sergei Lebedev in Minsk on 9 November, Belarusian Television reported. "I especially want to thank you for your help with information and support, for those analyses you send to me on both a regular basis and the eve of major events, which, thank God, we have calmly [survived] in Belarus," Lukashenka told Lebedev. "Indeed, there is close cooperation and full understanding between us. We have been working shoulder to shoulder and, I think, will continue to work in the same way," Lebedev responded.(RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 10)

LUKASHENKA SAYS ORT JOURNALIST INVOLVED IN DISAPPEARANCE CASE — Belarusian President Lukashenka also said that last week's film by the Russian Public Television (ORT) about the disappearance of ORT cameraman Dzmitry Zavadski in Minsk earlier this year was politically motivated. "The man who made the film [Zavadski's colleague Pavel Sheremet, an ORT journalist] has [something] to do with Zavadski's disappearance," Interfax quoted Lukashenka as saying. According to the film, Zavadski was kidnapped by people who worked for the Belarusian president's security service and the Belarusian Interior Ministry's special task force "Almaz." According to Sheremet, some of those people have been arrested, but Belarusian prosecutors are keeping silent about the case. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 15)

LUKASHENKA PLEDGES 30 PERCENT INCREASE IN ARMY COMBAT ABILITY — On November 14, during a visit to eastern Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko said he would reinforce THE Belarusian army to withstand pressure from the West and his political opponents at home. The Belarusian leader said that a strong army is a convincing argument to present to his critics both at home and abroad. Because we are located on the border with NATO, we must keep our powder dry, he said, referring to the admission of neighboring Poland to NATO last year. We have the best-trained army in the post-Soviet area. Next year its combat readiness will increase by 30 percent to prevent anyone from poking their nose in here, Lukashenko said at the meeting with deputies of the Mogilev Regional Council. An attack on us has already been launched, Lukashenko said, adding that he would not tolerate attempts to shake up the country and would crack down on unsanctioned protests. One must not lose his heart while in power, the Belarusian strongman told reporters. He confirmed his intention to seek reelection next year, adding that the election will be more difficult than the previous one. We will be pressed from all directions, he said. Lukashenko also said that he expects the newly elected U.S. president to pursue a policy aimed at improving relations between Belarus and the U.S. I have always been ready for a constructive dialogue with the U.S., but I cannot watch calmly as my authority is being broken over a knee, he said. (Belapan, November 14)

LUKASHENKA AGAIN SLAMS OPPOSITION AS 'ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE.' — Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 17 November accused the opposition of opposing the planned construction of a second link of the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline in Belarus as part of Gazprom's scheme to bypass Ukraine via Poland and Slovakia. Lukashenka said such oppositionists can be called "traitors" and "enemies of the people." "They are so embittered and hateful toward their people and Lukashenka that they are ready to act as with the Czech [grain] credit: let the Belarusian people kick the bucket, along with such a president," Belarusian Television quoted him as saying. Former Premier Mikhail Chyhir denied that anybody from the opposition is against the construction of the new pipeline across Belarus. "A lot of internal problems for Lukashenka have appeared, [and] as usual, he starts accusing the opposition," Chyhir told Belapan. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 20)

BELARUSIAN LEGISLATURE ELECTS NEW SPEAKER — The Chamber of Representatives on 21 November elected 60-year-old Agriculture Minister Vadzim Papou as its speaker. According to independent observers, the election highlights the subservience of the current legislature to Lukashenka, who told its deputies at a closed-doors meeting last week to revoke support for their favorite, Uladzimir Kanaplyou, and elect Papou instead. Earlier, 66 deputies had expressed support for Kanaplyou, who was deputy speaker of the former Chamber of the Representatives and is widely seen as one of Lukashenka's closest associates. Kanaplyou withdrew his candidacy by saying that "there is an objective need for me to perform certain duties before the presidential elections." Kanaplyou was elected deputy speaker. Some observers suggest that Lukashenka prefers Russian-born Papou because the latter is not allowed to run in the presidential elections and therefore will not use the parliamentary rostrum to promote a bid for the presidency. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 22)

BELARUSIAN ADMINISTRATION SHAKE-UP SEEN AS TIGHTENING SECURITY... — Belarusian Television's main newscast "Panarama" on 27 November discussed several possible reasons for President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's sacking of three top security officials earlier the same day (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 27 November 2000). Lukashenka is reported to be dissatisfied with security bodies' investigation of several high profile cases, including the disappearance of prominent oppositionists Yury Zakharanka and Viktar Hanchar and Russian Public Television cameraman Dzmitry Zavadski. Another reported reason is NATO's alleged attempt to destabilize the situation in Belarus "according to the Yugoslav scenario, which includes armed intervention." The program also warned against possible terrorist acts on Belarus's communication links and pipelines. "Panarama" suggested that by replacing the inefficient officials Lukashenka is seeking to ward off the emerging threats and "to decisively reinforce the structure of state power." Neither Lukashenka nor any administration official has so far commented on the security reshuffle.(RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 27)

BELARUS TO GET RID OF OSCE MISSION? — During a meeting with the KGB leadership on 28 November, Alyaksandr Lukashenka suggested that Belarus no longer need play host to the OSCE Minsk mission, Interfax reported. According to Lukashenka, the OSCE mission has already fulfilled its task of providing recommendations to improve Belarus's electoral legislation. "No one is going to revamp the legislation before the presidential election," Lukashenka noted, adding that "the time has come to think about the role and the place of the OSCE advisory and monitoring group in Belarus." Meanwhile, Anatol Malafeyeu, head of the Chamber of Representatives' Commission for International Affairs, told the agency the same day that the OSCE mission has turned into "a center of categorical support for opposition politicians" and is currently causing "a wave of confrontation that destabilizes society." (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 29)

LUKASHENKO: WHO SAID I AM MORTAL? — On November 21, addressing the first session of the newly elected Belarusian parliament, Alexander Lukashenko said that he wants to build an administration that will remain in power for decades, if not centuries. We must together pave the way for a power that will last for decades and perhaps even centuries, the Belarusian leader said. Lukashenko ruled out what he called any Yugoslav scenario in the next year presidential election. He confirmed his desire to hand over some

of his powers to the parliament some time in the future, adding that after the presidential election he may initiate a referendum to make the constitution more flexible. On the same day, the Lukashenko handpicked parliament elected Vadim Popov, 60-year-old Minister of Agriculture, as its speaker. Local observers believe that the dictator favored Popov, who was born in Russia and therefore is not eligible under Belarusian legislation to run for the Belarusian presidency, over another candidate, Vladimir Konoplev, former deputy speaker and one of the Lukashenka's closest associates. Konoplev subserviently withdrew his candidacy and was awarded for loyalty with a position of deputy speaker. (Belapan, November 22)

REGIME GETS READY FOR NEXT YEAR'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION — On December 4, at a meeting with Viktor Chikin, director of the Belarusian State Television and Radio Company, who is also a deputy chair of the Minsk City Council and First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, Lukashenko demanded that extreme measures be taken to withstand pressure from the West and to make sure that the population is provided with objective information about the current political events in the country and abroad. He accused foreign patrons of helping ideologists of the Belarusian opposition to create and impose on people various myths oriented toward weakening [Belarusian] statehood and undermining socioeconomic stability. State television, run by Lukashenka's loyal servant Chikin, went all out to launch an unabashed propaganda campaign directed against the democratic opposition and the West during this year's parliamentary elections. Preparing for the next year presidential election, the regime increased the budget of the Company by 250 per cent and allocated about the equivalent of $1.5 million to the pro-Lukashenko Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union, popularly referred to as Lukamol, reported Narodnaya Volya, an independent newspaper. By denying the Belarusians of unbiased information, Lukashenko wants to made them spiritual cripples who cannot see any alternatives to him. (Belapan- *Narodnaya Volya*, December 4)

BELARUSIAN TELEVISION SAYS U.S. WANTS ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AGAINST MINSK — Belarusian Television's main newscast, "Panarama," reported on 8 December that "on behalf of the U.S. administration," Daniel Speckhard, former U.S. ambassador to Minsk, has called on the EU to introduce trade and economic sanctions against Belarus. The newscast said Speckhard also pledged that Washington will continue "to support anti-Belarusian actions." According to the program, Speckhard made those pronouncements at a meeting with "the leadership of the George Marshall Research Center in Garmish-Partenkirchen." The report also said Speckhard recommended that the OSCE mission in Minsk "work out scenarios for uniting the opposition forces of Belarus and hold a meeting of opposition leaders in the first half of 2001." The program commented that the OSCE Minsk group "has lost its independence and has in fact transformed from an advisory and monitoring group into an instrument of subversive anti-constitutional activity against the Belarusian state." (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 11)

KGB ORDERED TO ROOT OUT SUBVERSIVE WESTERN INFLUENCE — Resorting to desperate measures in an effort to keep its grip on power, the Lukashenko regime continues to use its favorite weapon - vicious propaganda against its opponents. On December 13, Leonid Yerin, newly appointed chief of the Belarusian State Security Council (KGB), accused the United States and the OSCE of teaming up with the opposition to subvert the existing state order, reported Belapan. U.S. diplomats have put themselves above Belarusian law and international norms, actively helping Belarus' radical opposition, which strives to overthrow the government, Yerin said. Several European countries and the U.S. use their official influence to keep Belarus politically and economically isolated, the Lukashenko official added. The KGB chief also accused the OSCE AMG of taking actions beyond its mandate and boosting anti-president orientated political structures on the eve of the presidential election. The KGB is vigilant and will stay on alert, since the hardest battle--the presidential election--is still ahead, Yerin warned. (Belapan, December 13)

STATE TV ACCUSES OSCE, U.S. OF HELPING SUBVERSIVE GROUPS IN BELARUS — The OSCE mission in Belarus has long annoyed official Minsk, since it has criticized the Belarusian government for human rights violations and fraud in the recent parliamentary election. On December 8-9, the Belarusian State TV accused the OSCE AMG of being involved in anti-Belarusian and anti-constitutional activities and supporting subversive groups and the radical opposition in their illegal attempts to seize power. State TV also claimed -- falsely --that during a meeting with the management of the George Marshall Research Center in the German town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Daniel Speckhard, former U.S. ambassador to Belarus, called on the European Union on behalf of the U.S. Administration to introduce trade and economic sanctions against Belarus. State TV alleged that Speckhard vowed to continue support of rebellious activities of the Belarusian opposition and recommended that the OSCE mission in Minsk to redouble its efforts to unite the opposition ahead of the presidential election. (Belapan, December 11)

LUKASHENKO ACCUSES OPPOSITION OF PREPARING BLOODY COUP D'ETAT — On December 19, addressing the upper house of his rubber-stamp parliament, Lukashenko said he would not tolerate any foreign interference in the country's internal affairs, especially any cash injection in the oppositions presidential election campaign. He said he was keeping an eye on Western bodies, including the Minsk mission of the OSCE, who is preparing bands of collaborators [the observers for next years election--Ed]. I have no idea what these people will do in reality, Lukashenko shared his concern with compatriots. If we make embarrassing facts public, they will have to leave our country, Lukashenko said, referring to the activities of OSCE AMG in Belarus. Who gave anyone the right to come here and carry out anti-state policies? he elaborated. He added that the Western secret services had been showing intense interest in Belarus and warned the Belarusian Foreign Ministry and the security agencies that he would not tolerate their lax attitudes toward those unafraid of violating the law and preparing the basis for a coup d'etat. The Belarusian strong man said that the is perfectly aware of the fact that the corrupted opposition, which is trying to seize power by any means with the large support of the West, has brought explosives and arms to the country in order to carry out a bloody overthrow of the government. (Belapan, December 18-21)

BELARUS ARRESTS FOUR FOREIGNERS ON ESPIONAGE CHARGES — On December 19, Lukashenko told reporters in Minsk that four people had been detained recently in Belarus for alleged spying, including a German, a Pole, a Belarusian, and a suspect from a Baltic country, reported Belapan. Lukashenko said a German had been arrested on September 16, but he did not provide any details of the case. The Belarusian leader said that Germany did not deny it and that he hoped for a reasonable settlement of the issue. The report identified the suspect as Christopher Lez, a faculty member of the George Marshall Research Center in the German town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, appeared in the

December 15 issue of Stars and Stripes, U.S. military newspaper. Citing an anonymous sources at the Center, the paper wrote that Lez, a former Polish military officer who had defected to the West during the Cold War, had been arrested in Moscow, while doing independent research, transferred to the KGB prison in Minsk and charged with espionage, an offence punishable under the Belarusian law by up to 15 years in prison or the death penalty. Belapan reported that the German embassy in Minsk declined to comment on a report that a foreigner arrested on 16 September on espionage charges was a German citizen. On December 20, Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, Polish Foreign Minister, said that he is unaware of any Polish citizen being held in Belarus on spying charges. He said that the Belarusian authorities have still not confirmed the arrest of a Polish citizen to the Polish Embassy in Minsk. All we have is information from the press, Bartoszewski added. On December 21, Yevgeny Bobrov, deputy chief of the Belarusian KGB, confirmed in an interview to the Belarusian TV that four foreign spies had recently been arrested in Belarus, adding that 120 foreign spies had been uncovered working in the country over the last six months. (Belapan, December 20-21)

U.S. AMBASSADOR BLAMED FOR 'GROSS INTERFERENCE' IN BELARUS' AFFAIRS — Anatol Malafeyeu, head of the legislative Commission for International Affairs, has accused U.S. Ambassador to Minsk Michael Kozak of "gross interference" in Belarus's domestic affairs, Belapan reported on 18 December. Malafeyeu was commenting on Kozak's interview with the 16 December "Narodnaya volya." Kozak told the newspaper that there is virtually no dialogue between the U.S. and Belarus because of the illegitimacy of the Belarusian authorities. "As of today, Belarus has a parliament that we cannot recognize as a legislative power body representing the interests of Belarus's entire population. We also cannot recognize the legitimacy of the executive branch--its legitimate term in power has already expired," Kozak noted. Malafeyeu said Kozak's statement shows that the U.S. continues its policy of "double standards" with regard to Minsk. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 19)

BELARUS REACHES OUT TO BAGHDAD — First deputy head of the Belarusian presidential administration Vladimir Zametalin met with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on 23 December, ITAR-TASS reported. Zametalin presented the Iraqi leader with a letter from his Belarusian counterpart Alyaksandr Lukashenka and said that Minsk will soon open direct flights to Baghdad. For his part, Saddam Hussein invited Lukashenka to visit Iraq. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 27)

NEW CRIMINAL AND PROCEDURAL CODE IN FORCE — On January 1, the new Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedures, which were adopted in June 1999, entered into force. While introducing the new codes, Alexander Lukashenko claimed they meet international standards and are the most democratic among CIS countries, reported Itar-Tass. Local and international experts say that no real reform of the judiciary is envisaged by the new legislation. Investigative bodies remain under the control of executive branch, namely, the Interior Ministry, the Prosecution, and the Security Service. Investigators are appointed by and report to the heads of the respective state institutions. Nothing is offered to ease the plight of detainees, who are often treated with cruelty and humiliation. There are many instances of where illegal methods of investigation, including torture, are used to obtain confessions. Investigation and court proceedings are often prolonged, from several months to several years. The cases of Vasily Starovoitov, former head of the country's most successful agricultural joint-stock company; Vasily Leonov, former Minister of Agriculture, and Andrei Klimov, a deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet and businessman, were in pre-trial investigation for more than two years. During the time, those under investigation were remanded in custody since Belarus has no bail system. Under Lukashenko, judges are pressured to submit to government will, particularly in political cases. Telephone justice, the practice of executive and local authorities dictating court decisions, is widely reported to continue. Judges are appointed and promoted by presidential decrees. Public defenders are often employed by human rights NGOs, especially for political trials, since state attorneys are afraid to participate in such proceedings. The new Criminal Code, which says nothing about public defenders, will further limit the possibilities for public defenders assistance in criminal cases. The jury system has not been introduced. (Itar-Tass, January 1)

ECONOMY

LUKASHENKA CALCULATES COST OF BELARUSIAN 'SERVICES' TO RUSSIA — RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported that during his 12 October address to the legislature, Lukashenka "quite unexpectedly" mentioned his conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin the previous day. According to Lukashenka, Putin "reproached" Belarus for buying Russian gas at $40 per 1,000 cubic meters while world prices stand at $100. Lukashenka told lawmakers that each year Belarus renders $850 million worth of "services" to Russia, including "military bases, transit, and other services." He added that Russia's use of radar station at Hantsavichy (Brest Oblast) costs another $200 million a year. Therefore, Lukashenka argued, "We should not be badgered for the $200 million in gas debts [to Russia], which we sometimes fail to pay on time." He also said that Belarus's 100,000-strong army defends not only Belarusians but also "Russian brothers," which "costs a lot of money, too." (RFE/RL Newsline, October 13)

IMF: NO REFORMS, NO LOANS — Belarus will have to make substantial progress on long-overdue economic reforms before it can receive financial support, the IMF announced on October 20. In a scathing assessment of the country's ailing economy, the IMF's executive directors complained that there had been "no major strides in advancing structural reforms." "Fundamental progress toward macroeconomic stabilization and sustainable growth will require implementation of a comprehensive reform program, including tight macroeconomic policies and a coherent structural reform agenda," the IMF said. The Fund said it would not consider new lending, unless the Belarusian authorities will show a "clear, credible, and public commitment to a comprehensive and consistent stabilization and structural reform program." [The IMF halted lending to Belarus in 1996 and in 1998 the IMF‰s resident mission left Minsk in protest at the government's unwillingness to introduce serious market reforms.-Ed.]. (Reuters, October 21)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT WANTS TO REDUCE ARMY — Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on 3 November that Belarus should "optimize" its armed forces by reducing them to 75,000-85,000 troops, Belarusian media reported. Lukashenka added that reducing the size of the military may take up to 10 years. He said cuts will affect not officers but conscript soldiers. He also noted that although there currently is little international tension in the region, "with NATO's expansion to the East, we must keep our powder dry." Belarusian Television reported that the country's military currently numbers 122,000 troops. (RFE/RL Newsline, November 6)

THE LIBYAN CONNECTION — Alyaksandr Lukashenka's trip to Libya on 31 October and 1 November once again highlighted two aspects of his regime that the Belarusian state media have sought to hide from Belarusians for several years. First, Lukashenka is such an unwelcome guest outside the CIS area that the only foreign state visits he can make are to countries generally considered international outcasts. Indeed, Lukashenka's two previous foreign trips were to Fidel Castro's Cuba (September 2000) and Slobodan Milosevic's Yugoslavia (April 1999). Second, Belarus is in such desperate need of trade contacts and foreign investments that official Minsk does not miss a single opportunity to explore cooperation possibilities even with the least expected countries in terms of geographical location and technological advancement. "Such wealth as [that] in Libya one cannot possibly find in any other state. There is oil, big money, a huge market for our goods. And let's tell the whole truth -- our relations [with Libya] are developing rather well," Lukashenka commented to the Belarusian media before his flight to Tripoli. After landing in that city, he was shown on Libyan Television smiling and assuring Muammar Gaddafi that he is ready for "large-scale cooperation" and that "cooperation with Libya is very easy because of our similar positions." Back in Minsk, Lukashenka commented that Belarus can expect "tremendous results" from his trip to Libya. "[Libya] is an extremely rich country. ...But this is a country that does not have the level of industry, agriculture, and infrastructure that we have. In other words, our production -- beginning with wood processing and ending with latest technologies, including in the military area — are much needed there. Second, we would like to take advantage of [Libyan] investments in our economy. Therefore I asked Gaddafi's help in this regard. We are extremely interested in attracting Libyan capital to Belarus. In general, [the Libyans] are people who support and understand us." However, the officially announced results of the visit are somewhat less than impressive. The two sides signed agreements on mutual protection of investments, the creation of a joint trade and economic commission, and cooperation in education, science, and culture. The current trade turnover between the two countries is also unimpressive. According to Belarusian Television, so far this year Belarusian exporters have signed contracts with Libya worth only $1.5 million. Those contracts are for supplies of photographic materials, cables, and tires to the North African country. Belarusian and Russian commentators suggest that Libyan-Belarusian cooperation in the military sphere may be more profitable for both partners. Most of Libya's military equipment is Soviet-made, and Belarus could provide repair and maintenance services and spare parts as well as new weapons to Tripoli. According to Belapan, Lukashenka charged his closest aide, Security Council Secretary Viktar Sheyman, with the task of drafting a military cooperation accord with Libya. (RFE/RL, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine Report, Nov. 7)

FOOLED IN TOBRUK — Last week, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on an example of Belarusian-Libyan cooperation in the sphere of construction services. On the eve of Lukashenka's trip to Libya, some 40 Belarusian construction workers returned from Tobruk, where they had worked under a four-month contract negotiated by the Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union. But three members of that team returned from Tobruk before the four months were up and without money. They told an RFE/RL Minsk correspondent the following story. The workers' contracts said they would each be paid $400 a month. However, in Tobruk their personal contracts were taken away by the contractor and "revised" so that their monthly wage shrank to $260. The contractor also removed from the contract the provision of medical insurance. Moreover, it turned out that the construction site they were working on had only one crane, and the Belarusian constructors were largely forced to transport construction materials by hand. And to add insult to injury, a Yugoslav team working at a nearby site was paid $1,500 per capita a month for basically the same work. Three construction workers from the Belarusian team left Tobruk in protest -- they were not paid anything. The rest worked for the duration of the contract and were paid $250 (not $260) for each of the four months. Asked to comment on the situation, an official from the Belarusian Patriotic Union told the RFE/RL correspondent that the three dissenters should have worked in Tobruk until the end of their contract. According to the official, they could manage without medical insurance and should be happy with $250 a month since they are unlikely to earn such money in Belarus. (RFE/RL, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine Report, Nov. 7)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES 40 PERCENT RISE IN WAGES... — Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 14 November said he has instructed the government to increase wages for state-sector employees by 40 percent in December, Interfax reported. Lukashenka noted that the pay rise will primarily benefit teachers and doctors. "The wage increase is not an empty promise. We will really do that," the agency quoted him as saying.(RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 17)

STATISTICS MINISTRY SAYS BELARUSIAN ECONOMY IS BLOOMING... — The Ministry of Statistics has announced that Belarus's GDP in January-October 2000 grew by 5 percent, compared with the same period last year, Interfax reported on 16 November. Industrial production in this period increased by 8.6 percent and agricultural production by 5.4 percent. Inflation in January-October 2000 totaled 87.3 percent. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 17)

...WHILE INDEPENDENT EXPERT CLAIMS BELARUS ENDURES 'ECONOMIC ABSURDITY.' — Belarusian economist Leanid Zlotnikau has said that the Belarusian government is continuing an "economic absurdity" in Belarus, Belapan reported on 16 November. According to Zlotnikau, the government "has virtually restored the Soviet-era practice of Gosplan" [the State Planning Committee of the USSR] to regulate the economy. "It is impossible to manage complex economic processes with simple methods. Such a policy may result only in the population's impoverishment," Zlotnikau said. He rejected the government's explanation that price hikes in Belarus this year were caused by increased prices for oil and "the accelerated devaluation of the Belarusian ruble." In Zlotnikau's opinion, prices and inflation in Belarus continue to rise because the government has not stopped its policy of printing money and issuing soft credits.(RFE/RL

KREMLIN PLAYS ROLE OF IMF IN BELARUS — Russia and Belarus still cannot agree on which country will have the control of the printing presses and monetary policy if the two economies are merged. So far Minsk has been paying off a $227 million debt to Moscow partly with shipments of tractors. But in an effort to keep the controversial Russian-Belarusian reunification drive alive, Mikhail Kasyanov, Russian Prime Minister, announced on November 14 that Russia would loan Belarus $100 million to help support the wobbly Belarusian ruble, reported Interfax. The loan was announced at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Russia -Belarus Union, an organization set up to oversee the eventual assimilation of Belarus into the Russian economy. At the end of this month, President Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko are expected to sign a treaty on unifying their national currencies. The merger itself will still

be five years off, but ultimately Belarus is to accept the Russian ruble as its national currency. Before then, Kasyanov said, the Belarusian economy needs to be brought up to par with Russia's. The loan is to be modeled after similar loans Russia has gotten from the International Monetary Fund: it will be doled out in tranches, with each tranche dependent on both need and on Belarus adopting the economic policies that Russia recommends. A first $30 million tranche of the loan could be delivered to Minsk by the end of December, Kasyanov said. (Interfax, November 14)

BELARUS, IMF FAIL TO AGREE ON 'SHORT-TERM' REFORM PLAN — The Belarusian government and an IMF mission have failed to agree on an IMF-endorsed short-term reform program during the past two weeks' talks in Minsk, Belapan reported on 5 December. The talks were "useful and rather concrete" but failed to produce a memorandum on the program, IMF representative for Lithuania and Belarus Mark Horton told journalists. According to Horton, Minsk refuses to comply with IMF recommendations to improve the business environment; in particular, the fund recommended revoking the presidential decree that provides for confiscating the property of individuals and corporations that cause "damage to the state." The fund and the government also disagree on the pace and extent of price liberalization in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 6)

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ORDERS IMPROVED LIVING STANDARDS WITHOUT MARKET REFORM — Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 6 December discussed prices and wages with the cabinet, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The president repeated his former order to increase the average monthly wage to $100 by October 2000 (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 14 September 2000). According to official data, the average monthly wage in Belarus currently stands at $68. Simultaneously Lukashenka warned Premier Uladzimir Yarmoshyn against making any market-oriented moves. "You want to follow the path of many former USSR republics and plunge the state and the people into a market chaos. This won't happen," Lukashenka said. He endorsed Yarmoshyn's proposal to keep budget spending down by reducing the number of ministerial portfolios and told the premier to make this reduction "immediately in December." (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 7)

BELARUSIAN TEACHERS WANT PAY RISE — Some 168,000 teachers have signed an appeal demanding that their wages be increased by the end of the first quarter of 2001 to equal the average pay in the industrial sector, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 7 December. Tamara Chobatava, head of the Trade Union of Education and Science Workers, did not rule out that teachers will go on strike if the government fails to meet their demand. She admitted, however, that the union is too poor to help striking teachers financially in the event of a long protest. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 8)

SUPREME ECONOMIC COURT RULES AGAINST OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION — On December 18, Judge Valery Shobik of the Belarusian Supreme Economic Court ruled that the closure of Magic Publishing House and the seizure by the Lukashenko government of its printing equipment was lawful. The equipment was owned by the New York-based Open Society Foundation supported by financier George Soros and leased to Magic when the Soros-sponsored foundation was forced to leave Belarus. The Court refused to recognize the 1997 contract, which transferred the publishing equipment from the Belarusian Branch of the Soros Foundation to the Open Society Institute, which later leased the equipment to Magic.

On September 13, Minsk police raided Magic, without a warrant, confiscating 112,000 copies of a special issue of Rabochy, a newspaper of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union, which called for the boycott of the parliamentary election. On September 19, the Pervomaisky District Court of Minsk fined Victor Ivashkevich, Rabochy editor-in-chief, and Dmitry Kostukevich, Rabochy's general counsel, for alleged violation of the election legislation under Art. 167, para. 3 of the Belarusian Administrative Code. On October 16, representatives of the Leninski District Tax Inspection confiscated the equipment in order to cover the debts the Soros Foundation allegedly owed the state of Belarus (See Belarus Update Vol. 3, No. 46, 50, 51).

The League has repeatedly taken the position that this characterization of the tax debts of the Belarusian Soros Foundation is politically-motivated and unjust, since charitable, non-profit activity for education, humanitarian work, human rights, and democracy-building ought not to be taxed, wrote Catherine Fitzpatrick, Executive Director of the International League for Human Rights, in an open letter to Alexander Lukashenko. In any event, the seizure of Magic equipment is unlawful since it no longer belongs to the Soros Foundation, and, therefore, cannot be used to pay the Foundations alleged debts. Moreover, the calls for a boycott are in fact legal under the Belarus Constitution and as well as under international standards for the protection of freedom of speech and the press. The League views the closure of Magic as yet another step in the continuing and recently stepped-up campaign to crack down on the free press in Belarus and urges the Belarusian authorities to ensure that this and other gross violations of the basic principles of freedom of press are ended immediately. (ILHR, Charter 97, December 19

BELARUS, NORTHWEST RUSSIA TO OPEN STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT CENTER — Industrial, transportation and financial organizations in Belarus and Russia's northwestern regions agreed on 22 December to establish a strategic development center, ITAR-TASS reported. The new center will coordinate railroad tariffs and promote cooperation on pipeline and port construction. (RFE/RL Newsline, Dec. 27))

INDEPENDENT MEDIA

REGIME CONTINUES HARASSMENT OF INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING HOUSE — On October 11, the Lukashenko regime froze the bank accounts of Magic Publishing House, the only remaining private publishing house in Belarus. [A month ago, on September 13, Minsk police raided the publishing house, without a warrant, confiscating 112,000 copies of a special issue of Rabochy, a newspaper of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union, devoted to the opposition-staged boycott campaign of the October 15 election. On September 19, the Pervomaisky District Court of Minsk fined Victor Ivashkevich, Rabochy editor-in-chief, BYR 13,000 (about $13) and Dmitry Kostukevich, Rabochy's general counsel, 5,200 BYR (about $5) for an alleged "violation of the election legislation" under Art. 167, para. 3 of the Belarusian Administrative Code (See Belarus Update Vol. 3, No. 38-39)]. The United States condemned the seizure, saying that it appears intended to silence the beleaguered free press in Belarus. "We have information that an order has been issued to seize Magic's equipment on October 16, the day after parliamentary elections," Richard Boucher, State Department Spokesman, pointed out in a October 16 statement. He urged the Belarusian authorities to rescind this order, to release the Magic's bank accounts, and to cease persecution of the independent press. "The Lukashenko regime's actions against the Magic Publishing House constitutes an additional and important piece of evidence that

under the current conditions in Belarus it is almost impossible to hold truly free and fair elections. The U.S. will not recognize the results of elections in Belarus which are not democratic and we urge other governments to reinforce this same message with the Belarusian government," Boucher said in the statement. (USIA, October 20001

NEW CRACKDOWN ON INDEPENDENT PRESS — On October 26, Oleg Bozhelko, Belarusian Prosecutor-General, warned journalists in Minsk that those of them who disseminate slandering reports about Lukashenko and other high rank officials may face criminal charges. He cited Narodnaya Volya and Belarusskaya delovaya gazeta, two independent newspapers, as periodicals that on a regular basis libel the Belarusian leadership. Mikhail Sukhinin, Head of the Department of Registration of Public Organizations at the Belarusian Ministry of Justice, added that in accordance with the law On the Press a newspaper that published information about any organizations not registered with the Ministry, will be warned or shut down. As a recent example of such violation, he cited Narodnaya Volya, which published information about activities of two NGOs: Choice-2001 Committee, established by the Belarusian democratic opposition to promote opposition candidates who decide to run for the Belarusian presidency next year; and Civic Initiative, a Grodno-based NGO, promoting consolidation of democratic forces in the Region. Fearing that due to deliberately complicated re-registration procedure most of the country's independent media outlets will be closed, the Belarusian Association of Journalists has appealed to international organizations to send their experts in Belarus to study the situation on the spot. In accordance with reminder letters sent by the State Committee on Press, all Belarusian independent newspapers should be re-registered by January 2001. (BBC, Belapan, October 30 - November 3)6)

BELARUSIAN NON-STATE JOURNALISTS ASK FOR INTERNATIONAL HELP — The Belarusian Association of Journalists has appealed to international organizations to send monitors to Belarus to look into the media situation in the run-up to next year's presidential ballot, Belapan reported on 3 November. The association fears that most of the country's independent media outlets may be closed by January 2001, when all economic entities are obliged to re-register under a presidential decree. "Many are unable to re-register because the process lacks a clear legal framework. In addition, the central and local authorities have created a lot of bureaucratic barriers to prevent the newspapers from re-registering," the association said in a statement, adding that the situation of Belarus's independent media is "critical."(RFE/RL Newsline, November 3)

MEDIA WARNED FROM COVERING ACTIVITIES OF UNREGISTERED NGOs — On November 9, Gennady Vorontsov, Belarusian Minister of Justice, reiterated the warning voiced two weeks earlier by Oleg Bozhelko, Belarusian Prosecutor General, and Mikhail Sukhinin, Head of the Department of Registration of Public Organizations at the Belarusian Ministry of Justice, that in accordance with the Article 5 of Belarus Law On Press and Other Mass Media, any newspaper that publishes information about any organization not registered with the Ministry, will receive a warning. You should be cautious while dealing with nonexistent organizations, Vorontsov told journalists in Minsk. As an example of such ghost organizations, the Minister mentioned Charter 97, the nationwide civic movement, the Coordinating Committee on Observation of Elections, chaired by Mechislav Grib, the Choice-2001 Committee, established by the Belarusian democratic opposition to promote opposition candidates who decide to run for the Belarusian presidency next year, and Civic Initiative, a Grodno-based NGO, promoting consolidation of democratic forces in the Region. (Interfax, November 9)

MAGIC PRESS STILL RUNNING — Contrary to previous reports, Magic Press is in fact still running, although under threat of losing its equipment and possibly facing closure. In our Belarus Update, Vol. 3, No. 52, in a news brief titled Supreme Economic Court Rules Against Open Society Foundation, we wrote incorrectly, based on reports of the independent press in Minsk, that Magic Press, that the main independent publishing house for the independent and opposition papers in Minsk, had been closed and its equipment seized. In fact, as we subsequently learned from interviews with Stepan Zhernosek, Magics director, and Pavel Zhuk, editor-in-chief of Nasha Svaboda, an independent newspaper, Magic remains open and is still printing newspapers, although under pressure from the government. Authorities took physical inventory of Magic's equipment, including a Soros-leased press used by the press. Government officials threatened that the equipment would be seized, and the press would be forced to close, but so far the threats have not been carried out.

On December 18, Judge Valery Shobik of the Belarusian Supreme Economic Court ruled that the foundations equipment must be seized to cover tax debts allegedly owed by the Soros Foundation, which was forced to leave Belarus in 1997. The Foundation has appealed the ruling, and the a court hearing is scheduled for early in 2001. (ILHR, December 29)

INDEPENDENT TV CHANNEL CLOSED DOWN — Nasha Svaboda reported that starting January 1, Vosmy Kanal (Channel 8) the only independent Belarusian TV channel broadcast in Minsk on the eighth frequency wave band [hence the name], was forced to give up its frequency license to Stalichnaye Telebachanne (Capital TV), a TV station founded by the Minsk City Council and reportedly supported by Michael Myasnikovich, head of the Presidential Administration, his deputy Vladimir Zametalin, and Victor Chikin, head of the Belarusian State TV. As of today, Stalichnaye Telebachanne doesn't produce its own programming, simply retranslating Ren-TV, a Russian TV station owned by Gazprom. (*Nasha Svaboda*, January 5)

CULTURE

THIRD WORLD CONGRESS of BELARUSISTS

took place in Miensk on 4-6 December 2000.

It was attended by appr. 500 scholars and educators from 14 countries.

A day after its conclusion, Ms. Františka Sokolova — a Czech scholar from Prague — received an honorary doctor's degree from the university of Novapołacak.

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DICTIONARY of BELARUSIAN on INTERNET

A dictionary of Belarusian language (using the classic Taraškievica orthography) will be placed on internet by the end of the year 2000. — at http://slounik.hypermart.net

The internet version has been compiled by Siarhiej Šupa of the *Naša Niva* publishing house.

* * *

A book by ZIANON PAZNIAK entitled GLORIA PATRIA, was published in Vilnia (Lithuania).

Zianon Paźniak, the founder of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and its chairman in the years 1988-1999, is shown here in a different light.

The book contains a collection of Paźniak's artistic photographs, created in 1980s and his poems, written in that period.

HUMAN RIGHTS

BELARUSIAN POLICE DISPERSE RALLY TO COMMEMORATE 'FOREFATHERS.' — Police on 1 November dispersed a rally in Hrodna, northwestern Belarus and arrested some 30 people from the opposition Belarusian Popular Front who were marking All Saints Day, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 1 November. In Belarus, the 1 November is called Dzyady--the Day of the Forefathers. (RFE/RL Newsline, November 2

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE WARNS HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER — Viasna Human Rights Center, a non-governmental organization that sent its report about the human rights violations in the country to the UN's Committee against Torture, reported that on October 26 it received a warning from the Belarusian Ministry of Justice for allegedly using a name that differs from the name registered with the Ministry. Apparently concerned about possible confusion, the Ministry's officials demanded that the organization use Viasna Human Rights Center Public Association instead of Viasna Human Rights Center. Under the current law, two warnings within a year give the authorities sufficient grounds to shut down an organization. (Viasna, November 9)

LUKASHENKA'S SECURITY SERVICE ACCUSED OF MURDERING JOURNALIST, OPPOSITIONIST — A number of Belarusian media outlets have received an e-mail from an address on the yahoo.com free server accusing Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's Security Service of killing Russian Public Television cameraman Dzmitry Zavadski and opposition politician Viktar Hanchar, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 20 November. The sender, who identified himself as a Belarusian KGB officer, said the KGB arrested nine people, including five officers of the presidential Security Service, who confessed to killing Zavadski and burying him near Minsk. According to the sender, the arrested group was also "directly involved" in killing Hanchar, who disappeared in September 1999. The e-mail said Lukashenka has prohibited Zavadski's body from being exhumed and has ordered that the investigation be transferred from the KGB to the Interior Ministry in order to conceal security service agents' involvement in Zavadski's case. (RFE/RL Newsline, Nov. 21)

DETENTIONS OF OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS DURING HUMAN RIGHTS DAY PROTESTS — The Lukashenko regime is heading deeper into authoritarianism, restricting its citizens right to their freedom of opinion, assembly, and expression. Twenty opposition activists were arrested nationwide for marking the 52nd anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On December 10, about two hundred activists, wearing athletic vests with pictures of well-known Belarusian public figures who went missing over the recent years, gathered on Oktyabrskaya Square in downtown Minsk to mark International Human Rights Defenders Day and to demand release of all political prisoners, immediate investigation into the disappearances of prominent opposition leaders, and a free and fair presidential election. The demonstrators marched along Skaryna Avenue toward Independence Square, distributing the texts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and independent newspapers. (Charter 97, Dec. 11)

WORLD'S INTEREST IN BELARUS

NEW US AMBASSADOR IN BELARUS — On September 29, during the official ceremony of administering the oath to Michael G. Kozak, formerly chief of the US diplomatic mission to Cuba and now the new US ambassador to Minsk, Strobe Talbott, Deputy US Secretary of State, said that the situation in Belarus is alarming and frustrating, reported Charter 97. He said that the Belarusians deserve democracy and independence. Michael Kozak said that "The Belarusian people have displayed their love for freedom and one of their most famous slogans is 'for your freedom and ours!'" Belarus Update, Vol. 3, No. 41 October 2000.

MOSCOW WELCOMES BELARUSIAN POLL, SLAMS EUROPEAN CRITICISM OF VOTE — The Foreign Ministry of Russia Federation praised the election, saying it had been conducted "calmly and in organized fashion" and criticized its detractors as prejudiced, reported Interfax. "The lack of objectivity of the majority of the conclusions, which ignore the radical steps Belarus has recently made to meet the conditions set by the OSCE, reveals the political and preconceived campaign aimed at justifying the continuing international isolation of Belarus," said the Ministry. Moscow hopes that Belarus will be accepted back into the parliamentary assembly of the OSCE, the Ministry statement concluded. On October 16, Russian President Putin called Lukashenko to congratulate him on carrying out a free and democratic election, reported Belapan. The Belarusian leader was also invited to the Black Sea resort of Sochi on October 19 to "discuss bilateral relations." On October 19, Lukashenko thanked Putin for Moscow's endorsement of the election and expressed his gratitude for "the great support and the position Russia took during the recent political events in Belarus." (Belapan-Interfax, October 17-19)

APPARENT MANIPULATION OF SOME INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS IN BELARUS — On October 17, responding to a press statement issued by the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) said that it cannot be associated with the conclusions of some international observers who appear to have been manipulated and noted the following:

"Some 150 international observers, with no relation to the OSCE/ODIHR, arrived mostly on the invitation of the Belarusian authorities to observe the October 15 parliamentary elections. They were present in country for only 4-5 days. The OSCE/ODIHR is informed that the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) has offered to pay or has actually paid the hotel and other per diem expenses for some of these observers. On the election day, the CEC organized guided bus tours for some observers to visit polling stations. The CEC provided to these observers OSCE/ODIHR reporting forms, without the authorization of OSCE/ODIHR. At the end of the process, the CEC made these observers sign a prepared statement, which praised the elections. The OSCE/ODIHR only established a Technical Assessment Mission for these elections, and no short-term observers were deployed on the election day. Based on a month-long monitoring of the process, the Technical Assessment Mission produced

detailed and documented findings, which were published on October 16 in a Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions," which can be found on the OSCE website at http:/ /"For these reasons, we strongly believe these 'elections' are not worthy of the name. True elections require more than people casting ballots on election day. They require unfettered campaigns with a free exchange of political views. They require transparent and credible tabulations of results. And they require an atmosphere of confidence and trust where candidates can express themselves openly - as opposed to the existing climate of pervasive fear, where political opponents disappear at night never to be seen again." (USIA, October 19) www.osce.org/odihr.

U.S. DISMISSES BELARUSIAN ELECTION AS UNDEMOCRATIC — The United States agrees with the conclusions of the OSCE and the European Parliamentary Troika that parliamentary elections in Belarus October 15 were not free, fair, or transparent, and says it will not accept the results. Following is the text of a statement made by T. Reeker, deputy State Department spokesman.

"The United States supports the view of our European allies that the October 15 elections in Belarus were not free, fair, or transparent. The assessment mission of both the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Parliamentary Troika concluded that the elections failed to meet the international norms for democratic elections. The United States does not accept the results of the elections and will continue to recognize the democratically elected 13th Supreme Soviet, led by Chairman Semyon Sharetsky, as the legitimate parliament of Belarus. Free, fair and transparent elections are not defined solely by unhampered balloting on election day. Such balloting is part of the process that makes up a democratic election, which necessarily must also include an unfettered campaign with a free exchange of views. Despite repeated encouragement by the U.S., EU and OSCE to create a climate necessary for such a campaign, the Belarusian authorities made no significant progress in this area. The United States deeply regrets that the Belarusian authorities ignored the desire of a growing number of Belarusian citizens to return to democracy, and strongly condemns the gross abuses committed by the Lukashenko regime during the elections. Presidential elections planned for next year must be free of such abuses, or they too run the risk of not being accepted by the international community." (USIA, October 16)

On October 19, Josiah Rosenblatt, charge d'affaires for the U.S. Mission to the OSCE, told the OSCE Permanent Council that the recent parliamentary election in Belarus "are not worthy of its name."(USIA, October 18)

EU SLAMS BELARUS FOR IGNORING ELECTION ADVICE — On October 18, the European Union criticized Belarus for ignoring its recommendations to ensure the parliamentary election was fair. "The EU deplores the fact that, despite certain positive steps the Belarusian authorities did not sufficiently take into account recommendations made jointly by the OSCE, the EU and the Council of Europe," the EU said in a statement issued by France, which holds the rotating presidency. It listed the recommendations as "the establishment of a political truce with the opposition, free and fair access to the media for all political movements, a reform of the electoral code to guarantee the fairness of the vote and a change in parliament's role in order to give it real powers." "The EU renews its support for the process of democratization in Belarus and hopes that significant progress can be made during the next elections," the statement said. (EU, October 18)

NATO STATES DISSATISFIED WITH BELARUSIAN ELECTIONS — On October 23, Lord Robertson, NATO Secretary General, told reporters in Brussels that the country-members of the alliance, are "utterly disappointed by the outcome of the Belarusian parliamentary election." He dismissed concerns voiced by the Belarusian authorities about NATO's expansion plans as groundless and expressed hope that Belarus, which is still involved in the NATO‰s Partnership for Peace program, would support the fundamental rights and democratic principles, which the program champions. (Interfax, October 24)

U.S.: BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES CONSIDER NGOs AN ENEMY FORCE — The right of citizens to form NGOs is "indispensable to the creation and blossoming of a rule-of-law state," David T. Johnson, U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE, told the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Review Meeting in Warsaw on October 20. He pointed out that "the status of NGOs and their relations with the authorities are a litmus test of the sincerity of participating States to implement their OSCE commitments on democratization." The ambassador expressed regret that in certain OSCE countries, including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus, authoritarian governments are cracking down on NGOs. Following are excerpts from Johnson's statement concerning Belarus:

"In Belarus, state authorities often regard grassroots NGOs, including independent trade unions, as anti-governmental organization. As a corollary, the government attempts to limit NGO activities. Last month, official warnings were issued to human rights organizations and to political parties because of small discrepancies between the title of the organizations, as identified on their stationery, with the officially registered name [See Belarus Update Vol. 3, No. 37]. Under the current regulations in Belarus, the authorities can close an NGO after two warnings. The Lukashenko regime and local authorities also harass independent NGOs by refusing to rent them office space or conferences venues. One of the more recent examples of this type of harassment was the refusal to rent the Belarusian Association of Journalists a conference hall in Vitebsk to hold an independent press festival [See Belarus Update Vol. 3, No. 38]." (USIA, October 24)

OSCE AMG DOES NOT "CHANNEL FUNDS" — Belapan reported on October 19 that Alexander Lukashenko had accused the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus of channeling $70,000 to the opposition. The Belarusian strongman also referred to the October 13 meeting with the Parliamentary Troika in the course of which "he reproached Wieck and the others" regarding financial support for the opposition. During that meeting, Amb. Wieck informed Lukashenko that the OSCE AMG pays salaries for services rendered like any other institution. This, Amb. Wieck underlined, was also the case with regard to the figures mentioned by the President in the meeting with the Parliamentary Troika. The funds at the OSCE AMG disposal come either from the OSCE budget, which is known to the Belarusian authorities, or from voluntary contributions from member states and institutions and transferred through the OSCE Secretariat. On October 24, the OSCE AMG in Belarus issued a statement saying that it has not "channeled funds to the Belarusian opposition." "The $70,000 referred to by Lukashenko is part of the funds needed for the countrywide network of independent election observers, organized by the NGOs and partially supported by the OSCE AMG in Belarus. Election observation is a legal activity of non-governmental organizations and of individual citizens of the country," the OSCE AMG said in the statement. (Belapan, OSCE, October 19, 24)

ILHR CONDEMNS RECENT ATTACKS ON INDEPENDENT PRESS IN BELARUS — The International League for Human Rights, an international non-governmental human rights organization with consultative status at ECOSOC UN, expressed serious concern about the continuing harassment of independent press in Belarus in view of the recently delivered warning to Nasha Slova [Our Word] and the attack on the office of Shag [Step]. This and other warnings in the recent past, the re-registration of media outlets, the confiscations of copies of several independent newspapers, and attacks on newspaper offices are clearly an effort to further cripple the NGO sector and independent press in Belarus, particularly related to the country's political life, monitoring and publicizing human rights violations, advocacy on behalf of victims, and, as is the case with Nasha Slova, development of the Belarusian language and culture, wrote Catherine Fitzpatrick, Leagues Executive Director, in an open letter to Alexander Lukashenko. We are particularly concerned that these attacks follow repeated assurances by the government of Belarus that they were serious about complying with OSCE standards for elections, she said, adding that not only access to state media, but removal of unlawful restrictions on independent media outlets are vital for the development of democracy in Belarus. The League urged the Belarusian leader to ensure that these gross violations of the basic principles of freedom of press and association are ended immediately. (ILHR, November 8)

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION VS. LUKASHENKO — On November 2, the New York-based Open Society Foundation, established by George Soros, prominent American financier and philanthropist, filed a law suit against the Lukashenko government over its seizure of the Foundation-owned printing equipment in Magic Publishing House, the only remaining private publishing house in Belarus, reported Belapan. [On October 11, the Lukashenko regime froze the bank accounts of the House and five days later, seized Magics equipment (See Belarus Update Vol. 3, No. 43).- Ed.]. In a statement, the Soros Foundation accused the Lukashenko regime of silencing the beleaguered free press in Belarus and having no respect for private property. This is a serious warning to any potential investor to stay away, the Foundation said in the statement. It urged the Belarusian authorities to return the equipment to its owner and to cease the harassment of the independent press. (Belapan, November 6)

OSCE CONCERNED ABOUT HARASSMENT OF BELARUSIAN PRINTING HOUSE — Freimut Duve, the OSCE's representative on the freedom of the media, has sent a letter to Belarusian Foreign Minister Ural Latypau about harassment of the Magic private printing house in Minsk, Belapan reported on 19 October. Magic prints some 20 independent periodicals, including "Rabochy," "Narodnaya volya," and "Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta." The Belarusian authorities seized Magic's bank accounts on 11 October and five days later moved to confiscate equipment that Magic had rented from the Belarus-Soros Foundation. Duve said he is viewing these acts as a "clear and flagrant violation of basic democratic principles" and as an attempt to silence the independent media in Belarus. The U.S. State Department also condemned the Belarusian authorities' moves vis-a-vis Magic, urging them to "cease persecution of the independent press." (RFE/RL Newsline, October 20)

INTERNATIONAL DELEGATES SUPPORT BELARUSIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES — Delegates of the international conference organized in Vilnius by Democracy in Belarus, a Lithuanian-based NGO, called on the international community to support the united Belarusian opposition in its struggle for democracy, the rule of law, and development of a market economy in the country. Belarus has become an authoritarian police state where human rights are routinely violated and the freedom of assembly, association and information are blatantly disregarded. Political opponents are either exiled, imprisoned, or made to disappear, wrote the delegates in the appeal. They condemned the politically-motivated arrests of dissidents and urged their immediate release. In an interview to BNS, Saulius Peceliunas, former Lithuanian deputy and the head of parliamentary liaison with the disbanded Belarusian 13th Supreme Soviet, said that the conference was organized to raise the international profile of this issue and to place pressure on the Belarusian government to hold free and fair presidential elections in 2001. (Baltic News Service, November 7)

US AMBASSADOR GIVES BELARUSIANS LESSON ON DEMOCRACY — With considerable international speculation about the ultimate outcome of U.S. elections, still stalled in vote re-counts, on November 8, Amb. Michael G. Kozak, formerly chief of the US diplomatic mission to Cuba and now the new US envoy to Minsk, made a speech at the reception in the U.S. embassy in Minsk on the occasion of the U.S. presidential election. He mentioned five essential elements that make a presidential or the parliamentary election democratic:

1) the opponents as well as the supporters of the government in power have an equal opportunity to organize themselves to pursue peaceful political ends without fear of arrest or harassment;

2) all significant political groupings have equal opportunities to access all the news media in order to expose their views and proposals to the voting public;

3) the media is free to question and comment on the government and opposition candidates and political platforms alike;

4) the rules of the election are fair and do not unreasonably disqualify candidates from getting on the ballot; 5) the people charged with administering the system are either truly independent or represent a sufficient balance that they will have credibility with the population and the outside world when they make a ruling, and that all decisions and processes be open to public and international scrutiny. (Charter 97, November 9)

NATO TO UNSEAT LUKASHENKA ? — The Moscow-based *"Kommersant-Daily"* reported on 21 November that NATO will render financial support to a candidate of the Belarusian democratic opposition during next year's presidential elections in Belarus. A London correspondent for the daily wrote that this proposal was made by NATO official Jamie Shea during his address to "the Cambridge Club, one of the most influential discussion clubs in Great Britain." According to "Kommersant-Daily," Shea told the club that NATO helped the Yugoslav opposition elect Vojislav Kostunica and wants to use a similar method in Belarus. The newspaper quoted Shea as saying: "I think that Belarus is the next country in Europe where NATO should apply a similar tactic. We should financially support the democratic opposition to the Lukashenka regime during the elections."

Shea rejected the *"Kommersant-Daily"* report in a letter to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, which was made public by Foreign Ministry spokesman Pavel Latushka in Minsk on 22 November. Shea wrote that "Kommersant" had "fully fabricated" what he was alleged to have said at the Cambridge Club, adding that he neither referred to Belarus nor spoke about NATO interference in the domestic affairs of other countries.

Latushka, for his part, said that the report in *"Kommersant-Daily"* was "a provocation of the first order." "One need not pit the Republic of Belarus against NATO, which is one of the world's most influential organizations," Latushka added. Belarusian Television's notorious

"Panarama" newscast the same day took advantage of the canard in *"Kommersant-Daily."* Before reporting on Shea's denial and Latushka's comment, the program presented Shea's alleged pronouncement on Belarus as an indisputable fact and broadcast comments from two members of the Chamber of Representatives and Russian Duma Deputy Frants Klintsevich, who criticized NATO for its plans to interfere in Belarus's domestic affairs.

As for *"Kommersant-Daily,"* it maintained on 24 November that its 21 November story was true. This time, however, Shea's alleged pronouncement was presented as follows: "Incidentally, I think that Belarus might become the next country where a similar tactic can be applied." (RFE/RL, Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, Nov. 28)

U.S. URGES BELARUS TO CHOOSE PATH TO DEMOCRACY— On November 16, Oscar DeSoto, Deputy Political Counselor, told the Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna that the United States has full confidence in the finding of the OSCEs Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the European Troika that recent elections in Belarus were not free and fair, and it urges Belarus to choose the path to democracy. Following is a transcript of his remarks:

Madame Chairperson, the United States would like to reaffirm its position and express full confidence in the ODIHR and the European Troika finding that expressed disappointment regarding the recent elections in Belarus and the finding that they did not meet international standards for free and fair elections.

The United States urges Belarus to implement its OSCE commitments and to choose the path to democracy. Belarus should take concrete steps immediately to meet international standards, including respect for human rights, to pave the way for recognition of the upcoming presidential elections. We are disturbed by the November 15th spot report by the Advisory Monitoring Group that on November 12th the militia in Minsk blocked a peaceful march by youth organizations, including the youth branch of the Belarus Popular Front and arrested approximately 100 youths. We understand that another 15 youths were arrested at a similar march in Grodno. Some of the arrested have been put on trial. University student Andrei Yurkovets has been sentenced to three days in jail and at least three other students were fined 20 minimum monthly wages each. These acts are contrary to Belarus OSCE commitment to freedom of assembly. They also undermine the international community's confidence in the government's commitment to improve human rights and to establish a period of peace as promised by President Lukashenko.

We reissue our call to the Belarusian authorities to meet their OSCE commitments and international standards for free and fair elections. Only under such conditions can next year's presidential elections win the respect of the international community. (USIA, November 17

NATO DENIES REPORTS ABOUT ITS PLANS TO FINANCE BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION — *Kommersant*, a Russian daily, reported that during a speech at the Cambridge Union Debating club in Britain, Jamie Shea, head of NATOs information department, said that NATO plans to finance the Belarusian opposition ahead of the countrys next year presidential election. In response to the report, the pro-Kremlin Unity party accused NATO of interference in internal affairs of a sovereign state and breach of international law. On November 21, Shea denied the report. I did not even mentioned Belarus, let alone NATOs helping its opposition, Shea said in a telephone interview to Interfax from Brussels. (Kommersant, Interfax, November 20-21))

OSCE TRAINS PUBLIC DEFENDERS IN BELARUS — The OSCE AM Group in Belarus is currently implementing a project titled Training of Public Defenders and Support to the Independent Legal Sector, funded by the European Union and the OSCEs Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. One of the components of the project is training seminars for public defenders. The Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the Public Legal Aid Association, two leading Belarusian human rights NGOs, have been selected to hold the series of seminars, both in the regions and in Minsk. They have jointly published a Handbook for Public Defenders, which will be distributed at the seminars and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Justice and other government institutions of Belarus. On November 25-26, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee held seminars in Glubokoye, Vitebsk Region, and in Molodechno, Minsk Region, which were attended by a total of 60 people, representing members of human rights organizations active in those regions, attorneys, journalists, and city authorities. Seminars for public defenders will be also held in 15 other towns of Belarus, including Orsha, Polotsk, Novopolotsk, Soligorsk, Svetlogorsk, Lida, Novogrudok and all regional centers. The seminar program is expected to be completed by February 2001, and will be marked by a final two-day seminar in Minsk, which will focus on more advanced training of the most active participants chosen from the regional seminars. (OSCE, November 29

PACE OFFICIAL WARNS MINSK AGAINST REMOVING OSCE MISSION — Wolfgang Berendt, who is the rapporteur for Belarus of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service on 11 December that President Alyaksandr Lukashenka will exacerbate Belarus's already poor relations with European organizations if he decides to ban the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group from Minsk. Berendt was commenting on the recent propaganda campaign on Belarusian Television against the OSCE Minsk mission. On 7 December, Belarusian Television called the mission "an instrument of subversive anti-constitutional activity against the Belarusian state." The next day, the station broadcast a documentary in which OSCE Minsk mission head Hans Georg Wieck was called a "German spy." Last month Lukashenka suggested that he no longer needs the OSCE group in Minsk (RFE/RL Newsline," Dec. 12)

U.S. REFUTE ALLEGATIONS BY BELARUSIAN TV — In a December 11 letter to the Belarusian Ambassador in Brussels, Speckhard called the Belarusian TV report about his alleged statements against Belarus a fabrication from start to finish, adding that he was appalled at the brazen nature of the effort to influence public opinion with such obvious lies, and was deeply disturbed by the attempts of the Belarusian authorities to discredit him in the eyes of the Belarusian public.

On December 12, the U.S. Embassy urged State Belarusian TV to find the courage to admit the false nature of the report and to air a public apology to the Ambassador. It would be impossible for Amb. Speckhard to have made comments about recent political events in Belarus to an audience at the Marshall Center simply because he hasn't been to the Marshall Center for almost three years, the U.S. Embassy said in a statement. Amb. Speckhard has never called for economic and trade sanctions against Belarus, it said. Moreover, since he departed Minsk, Amb. Speckhard has not been speaking on behalf of the U.S. Administration, because he now works for all 19 nations at the NATO headquarters in Brussels and reports to the Secretary-General Lord Robertson, the Embassy said. (US Embassy in Minsk, December 12)

MEDIA WATCH

Will Yugoslav Model Work in Belarus? (*The Washington Times*, "Belarusian Opposition Hopes for a Yugoslavia-Like Revolt," October 15, 2000)

Belarus' held widely criticized parliamentary elections on October 15. Embattled Belarusian opposition leaders were urging a boycott of the vote, hoping the popular revolt that brought down the Yugoslav strongman would find an echo in the eventual unseating of President Alexander Lukashenka.

According to the article, Andrei Sannikov, a former deputy foreign minister of Belarus, in an interview with of The Washington Times, said that "We see a lot of parallels to the Yugoslav situation, and we think Belarus is going to be getting even more attention because it is the last omission on the continent for democracy." The presidential election is due late next year and opposition figures say they plan to take part in that campaign, hoping for the same success that the democratic coalition in Yugoslavia achieved. Belarus President Lukashenka, however, disagrees. "A Yugoslavia scenario — for which the opposition hopes — will not happen here," he said.

The article says that Mr. Sannikov received a warm welcome from top State Department officials, including a meeting with Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott. Both Sannikov and Talbott "agreed that there is little hope that the elections will be truly free, fair and transparent," the State Department stated after the meeting. "The United States will not recognize the outcome of elections in Belarus that are not democratic."

The article concludes that as in Yugoslavia, the Belarus opposition has a reputation for division and ineffectiveness, and Lukashenka is as skillful as Milosevic in keeping a single opponent from emerging to challenge him. Lukashenka retains a loyal base of support in the provinces, while the opposition is strongest in Minsk and other urban centers. Asked why Americans should care about the outcome in Belarus, Sannikov argued that a democratic, prosperous Belarus would drive the final stake in the dreams of many in Moscow of restoring the core of the old Soviet and Tsarist empires.

Sham Elections in Belarus (*The Economist*, "Bathetic in Belarus," October 21, 2000) —The article says that Belarus leader, Alexander Lukashenka, is the "last undemocratically chosen leader in Europe."

Earlier this year, according to the article, the Belarusian authorities had agreed with international organizations that Mr. Lukashenka's opponents would be given a fair chance at the polls, with proper access to the media, and would be able to go about their business without being harassed. Further, the election law would be changed, and parliament be given more power. All these promises have been broken and the election law allowed the authorities to disqualify dozens of independent candidates and to rig the count.

Most of the opposition boycotted the election. OSCE and EU institutions downgraded their presence to "technical observers ." They concluded that the poll "fell far short of minimum transparency requirements ." "But, for now, Belarus's president has got away once again with ignoring the rules of democracy as practiced elsewhere. He remains in power. The opposition, several of whose leaders are missing , still flounders. Critics abroad have little effect."

Attention now shifts to the next year's presidential election. Between now and then, the article says, Belarus faces three big questions. "First, can the opposition unite behind a credible challenger — perhaps a previously unknown figure like Serbia's Vojislav Kostunica? Second, how would Mr. Lukashenka react if it did? Third, what will Russia do with its troublesome and embarrassing western neighbor?"

The article contends that the opposition has been weak, plagued for years by a division between two camps. "One lot are Belarusian nationalists who see the reversal of Russification as a top priority. The others are more like liberal-minded politicians in Russia, keener on democracy and getting rid of Lukashenka than reviving Belarusian — spoken mainly in the countryside."

But squabbles persist, maintains the article. Accusations are being made of KGB infiltration, collaboration with the authorities, and foreign machinations. And there are clear differences between America and Germany over how to treat Belarus. The OSCE office in Minsk, headed by a German diplomat, Hans-Georg Wieck, preaches patience and engagement. "The only way forward is through negotiations," Wieck says. Some find that too soft. The article names Zianon Pazniak, an exiled opposition leader, as saying that Mr. Wieck "promotes the occupation of Belarus and the Russian empire's expansion ."

According to the article, American diplomats and human-rights campaigners take a harder line than the Germans. Some even see the fight for democracy in Belarus as the first skirmish in a new cold war with Russia. Some opponents fear that a state of emergency will preempt a presidential election altogether.

The regime's feistier foes talk about a "Yugoslav end " to Lukashenka. But conditions in Minsk, the article points out, look very different from those in Belgrade. People are more apathetic; the sense of nationhood, and therefore of patriotism, is far weaker; and the opposition in Belarus is notably feebler. Growing poverty makes people surly, but so long as Russia supplies cheap energy, the economy will not collapse.

Lukashenka's officials stress that Belarus will stay independent even when union with Russia is complete. A leading Belarusian sociologist sees differently. "Everything important is decided in Moscow," he says. "But a full-blooded merger, with or without Lukashenka, still seems quite a way off," concludes the article. "Russia already has most of what it wants in Belarus: a deniable proxy in the international arms trade, and a forward base for radar and eavesdropping or for placing extra troops or missiles in an effort to rattle NATO, should it, for example, seek to extend to the Baltic states."

Opposition Needs to Unite (*The New York Times*, editorial "Europe's Last Tyrant," October 31, 2000) — The editorial states that the fall of Slobodan Milosevic has left Europe with a single dictator, Aleksandr Lukashenka of Belarus. He was legitimately elected president in 1994, "but, with support from Russia, Mr. Lukashenka has since amassed near absolute powers, permitting little dissent or private enterprise. He openly admires Hitler and has said that Belarusians want him to bring back a Stalinist state."

This month's parliamentary elections offered a tidy illustration of Mr. Lukashenka's control, says the editorial, and there is little chance he will be toppled soon. "His relationship with Moscow is key to his hold on power. Under Mr. Lukashenka, Belarus provides Moscow with radar stations close to NATO nations and a safe conduit for a planned gas pipeline from Russia to the West. If the two countries reunite, Russia could establish a greater military presence in Belarus and satisfy the dreams of some in Russia who want to rebuild the Soviet Union. Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, congratulated Mr. Lukashenka on a "free and fair" vote for Parliament. Such backing shields Mr. Lukashenka from other foreign pressure, gives him legitimacy at home and props up the economy with energy and other aid."

The editorial concludes: "There is discontent in Belarus, but opposition forces have not been unified enough to translate this frustration into political power. That may change. The nine major opposition groupings have agreed, in theory, to work together. That is the only chance to defeat Mr. Lukashenka when he runs for reelection a year from now."

OSCE Fails to Restrain Russia (*The Wall Street Journal Europe*, "There's a Bear in the Woods," December 8, 2000) — The article reports that sphere-of-influence politics were back with a vengeance at the year-end meeting of the OSCE's Ministerial Council in Vienna on November 27-28. The meeting had to deal with a Russia trying to grab back parts of the ex-Soviet territory. "The foreign-affairs ministers of 55 member countries failed to hold Russia to its obligations to . . . cooperate with international efforts to restrain the dictatorship in Belarus."

In Minsk, meanwhile, Russian career intelligence officers took over the chairmanships of Belarus's KGB and National Security Council. The move in Minsk, says the article, coincided precisely with the OSCE's Vienna conference. And it exposed the constraints on the OSCE's ability to defend the sovereignty of a member country. "The takeover of Belarus's intelligence agencies rounds off a Russian takeover of top Belarus posts. The country's prime minister, defense minister and other senior officials are also Russians from Russia. President Aleksandr Lukashenka of Belarus staged Soviet-style parliamentary elections two months ago and plans to get reelected as president in a similar exercise in mid-2001."

The scenario calls for that election to be followed in due course by a merger of Belarus with Russia, concludes the article. The OSCE has not recognized the results of the electoral farce held in October. Even as the OSCE's meeting convened in Vienna, Lukashenka publicly threatened rom Minsk to discontinue the activity of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Mission in Belarus. And in Vienna, the Russian delegation vetoed a draft resolution that would have called for a democratic presidential election to be held in Belarus. Belarus, Moldova and Georgia now face direct threats to their independent statehood from new Kremlin leaders wedded to the old sphere-of-influence politics. "If those countries are left to their fate, their immediate neighbors from the Baltic states to Ukraine to Azerbaijan would be the next in line for pressure and intimidation... But the Western world must recognize that it has ample resources to make sure that no one turns the clock in Europe back to the time before 1991."

East by NorthEast, (*Prague Post*, Dec. 13, 2000)

Opponents battle the regime in Belarus, an authoritarian time capsule where the devastating effects of nearby Chernobyl's 1986 disaster live on..

Belarus struggles to find hope under repressive regime.

Editor-at-large Jeffrey Donovan produced an extensive and very informative overview of political and economic problems facing today's Belarus.

The piece includes views and observations of the opposition leaders Vincuk Viačorka, Aleś Bialacki, Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič, Aleś Michalevič and of Michail Pastuchoŭ, a former Constitutional Court justice.

LETTERS

Russell Zavistovich, a Belarusian Diaspora Leader, Dies at 72

He was of that rare breed of men who never shed their optimism throughout life.

Striving for justice and freedom for his compatriots, he tirelessly tried to unite all Belarusans in their struggle for cultural, ethnic, and political identity. While serving in the U.S. Army in 1952, he suffered severe trauma in the line of duty, but never lost his zest for life and went on to graduate with top honors from Rutgers University of New Jersey as an electrical engineer. A distinguished career as a technical expert and linguist in Washington, DC, followed. Upon retirement — unlike most people — he became even more active and devoted himself relentlessly to the cause of Belarusan independence and recognition of Belarusans in America as an ethnic entity. He was one of the key speakers at the First World Meeting of Belarusans in Miensk in 1993. As president of the Belarusan Congress Committee of America, both Presidents Shushkevich and Clinton alike listened to his informed views and consultations. He was invited as an honorary committee member to NATO's Fiftieth Anniversary Summit, but at that point had to decline due to his failing health.

His relentless enthusiasm and fervent desire to unite the disunited Belarusan diaspora in America was a sincere attempt to overcome the internal strife dominating the Belarusan emigre· political scene ever since the end of WW II. The recognition of both the U.S. and the first Belarusan government of his work is no mean accomplishment. Unfortunately, not all Belarusans were giving him credit where such merits are due. Only future scholars will be able to ascertain the genuine contribution made by this great Belarusan leader and patriot.

A native of the Słucak region, he had an intuitive lyric soul and an indefatigable spirit so often found with people of that region of Belarus. Throughout his life he exhibited this spirit in the multitude of struggles — be it in war-torn Europe and the horrors of forced labor camps, during his military service, scholarship, managerial and technical dilemmas in the U.S. civil service, or in the difficult tasks of uniting a fragmented Belarusan society in America. His life of fruition was imbued by an overwhelming degree of optimism and an abiding sense of trust in mankind and a duty to fight evil — be it communism, Nazism, chauvinism, or simple ignorance. But above all, his love of Belarus, its language, culture, music, poetry, and literature prevailed.

Sadly, we no longer have Rascislau Zavistovich in our midst. The great Belarusan statesman and patriot died peacefully in his home in Ft. Washington, Maryland, on December 20, succumbing to a series of medical complications. Mr. Zavistovich is survived by his wife, Iraida, his children Alexander and Valentina, and his three grandchildren.

The entire Belarusan community is grieved by his passing. *Dyk budź jamu ziamla pucham ! — May He Rest In Peace.*

Ihar Kazak
St. Petersburg,
Florida, USA

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